AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF TAMIL LITERATURE

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History of Tamil Literature

With a Foreword by

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FOREWORD

For one like me whose acquaintance with Tamil literature is casual and superficial, it is an embarrassment to be asked to write a Foreword to a History of Tamil Literature by so distinguished and dedicated a scholar as Mr M Arunachalam. He has to his credit collections of essays and books of Saiva exegesis, and in particular his work in progress – the many-spanned History of Tamil Literature, of which several volumes have come out already – would be hailed, when completed, as one of the truly monumental achievements of scholarship in our time But if I cannot speak as an expert, I can at least record my appreciation as a " common reader " (in the Johnsonian sense), who feels deeply beholden to Mr Arunachalam for these controlled views of the immense panorama of Tamil literature for the benefit of the English reader

Who can say how in the dark night of pre-history, first speech, then poetry, marked the two decisive stages in the evolution of *Homo Sapiens* ?

The Tree of Heaven, it's said, grows upside down,
roots above, and fruit
below.

Can it be that these seeming gusts of chance
had their sanction from
Above ?

Poetry was the language of wonderment, of varied and wild surmise; it became the coin of sensibility, it was the community's memory, its store of aspiration and achievement, it was the ineluctable link between the generations, and the projection of hope and future possibility. And poetry was often allied to music and dance in the communal life of the people But although poetry at first came as naturally as leaves sprouting on a tree, means were found to treasure poetry and transmit the best of it to posterity. In course of time, as one reviewed the poetry of a long stretch of years, some sort of pattern too seemed to reveal itself

But one may ask, What is a 'literary history' for? Indeed, what is 'history' for? And *what* is 'history'?

On a superficial view, 'history' is a record of the past, an *objective* record, but even this is not easy to accomplish We do not know all the facts. Surviving documentary, epigraphic and other evidence is a help, but the evidence is terribly incomplete Private unrecorded conversations may have determined many a decisive event, but of this we are wholly ignorant. Autobiographical memoirs may be loaded with self-glorification, prejudice, *suppressio veri* and *suggestio falsi*, and it is difficult to sift truth from half-truth and falsehood Social history is rather more significant than political history, but being in the nature of an "underground river" (G. M Trevelyan's phrase), the sinuous course of social history defies accurate description As for literary and cultural history, it is like catching the perfume in the air, the light dancing on the waters, or the music of the breeze playing on the leaves.

And isn't 'history' something more than an objective record of the 'past' – in politics and economics, in social and cultural life? Isn't 'history' verily a study of the unfolding of a progressive manifestation? If we believe that a nation is not just a jumble of recalcitrant individuals, but has its own evolving personality, its dialectic of becoming, then surely the history of a people, the history of a nation's literature, becomes invested with an inner law of evolutionary causation, a spinal cord of spiritual continuity, and to miss this inner truth might be to miss the whole essence and direction of the study.

It is usual to complain that 'scientific history' hasn't been cultivated in India, except in very recent times We are not strong on 'facts' and 'figures'. Mythology and hagiology have liberally spread their parasitic overgrowths on 'history' and 'biography' An excessive preoccupation with the eternities has encouraged perhaps the minimization of the realities of transient terrestrial experience On the other hand, the fact that so much of the culture and literature of the distant past should have been so carefully preserved for us reveals on the part of our ancestors a far-sighted and prudential management beyond all praise

The traditional history of the three 'Sanghams' may raise difficulties as regards their literal acceptance But certainly their sequence is a historical pointer Agastiya was clearly the forerunner, Tolkappiyar the great spokesman and codifier, while Nakkirar and his compeers belong to the centuries immediately before and after Christ.

Tolkappiyam itself, with which Histories of Tamil Literature begin, must have been preceded by ages of vigorous literary activity But *Tolkappiyam* is much more than a treatise on orthography, etymology and semantics , it is actually a unique compendium of ancient Tamil life and culture, laying due stress on *aram–porul–inbam–vidu* or *dharmarthakama-moksha*, and giving an integral view of the Tamil ethos of those times *Tolkappiyam* and the two Sangham Collections - *Ettut–tohai* and *Pattup–pattu* the Eight Anthologies and the Ten Songs – to which the great Kural too should be added, constitute a body of verse that fuses the formal and the functional, subjective and objective, romantic and heroic, secular and religious, ethical and spiritual, into a glory of poetic recordation unparallelled elsewhere

Tolkappiyam and *Kural* have of course their obvious and compelling unity in variety, but the tropical magnificence of the Ten Songs and the Eight Anthologies is a different matter It is an assembly of almost 2400 individual poems, out of which over three–fourths are love poems These latter are receiving increasing attention of late and although apparently stylized, and moving only within circum-scribed limits, the poets seem to be able to ring an endless variety of change in intensity, mood and felicit-ous expression The fivefold scenic differentiation - hill, jungle, field, seaside and wasteland – has an arche-typal quality, and it is astonishing that without a surplusage of sensuality or eroticism running riot, these poems should nevertheless be able to cover the entire gamut of romantic love For all their old-world bardic quality and popular flavour, the poems have

still a contemporaneous ring, for one has only to substitute the traditional scenic backgrounds by modern prototypes like automobile, hotel, motel, Marina or railway platform, and absence on account of war by study or employment abroad, and the rival charmer by present day Hollywood variations like the steno or receptionist at the office Only, modern poetry lacks that old taut intensity, that steely strength of phrasing, that sharp brevity and bite

But love could also mean Divine Love or *Parama-Prema*, God-intoxication and God-realization, and the Divine was sought in divers sacred spots, as in *Tiru Murukatruppadai*, that superb poetic formulation of the dynamic of aspiration, quest and ultimate fulfilment It is a distinctive mark of the poetry of the Sangham Age that man, Nature and God-feeling, thought and action – the inner, outer and transcendent realms – all mingle and merge in a total harmony No "dissociation of sensibility" here!

The main trends and the major figures of the post–Sangham Ages are a part of common knowledge The twin epics, *Silappadhikaram* and *Manimekhalai*, the monsoon spate of Bhakti poetry unleashed by Tirumoolar, the Nayanmars and the Alvars, Saiva Siddhanta literature spearheaded by Meykandar, Arulnandi and Umapati, and Vaishnava literature by Vedanta Desika and Manavala Mamuni, the Jaina-Buddhist interregnum, Kamban, a host in himself, and the lesser epic poets, the coming of the Crescent and the Cross, and the emergence of the Islamic and

the Christian poets; the new awakening, Tayumanavar, Arumukha Navalar and Ramalinga swami; the twentieth century, Subramania Bharati and after – it is like a perennial river flowing with many a winding bout, overcoming obstructions on the way, waxing wider and wider with deeps and shallows alternating or co-existing, and still flowing on and on, still receiving the freshes from the distant mountain-origins and also the tributaries all along the way, a splendorous life-giver, and luminous with the Sun's rays One is free to drink deep or but taste selectively from the perennial springs. New forms – short story, novel, social play, satire, free verse, essay, critique, radio talk – have come into currency to make the modern literary scene one of varied and almost exasperating complexity. But if one takes a synoptic view, one may perhaps see the soul of the old poetry inhabiting the new forms, for modern literature uncertainly oscillates between *aham* and *puram*, the good old wine is served up again albeit in novel containers, and the *Lyra Mystica* of an earlier age finds reincarnation in the work of, say, Sri Muruganar of Ramanashram Tamil literature is thus still adventurously evolving and fulfilling itself

Even when one is quite sure of the dates of authors and of their writings, a strictly chronological literary history has its limitations One may concentrate on a few outstanding authors or classics, but that would be at the expense of wide comprehension. One may attempt a genre-wise, subject-wise, groupwise, facet-wise division, and graft chronology too within reason Mr Arunachalam has followed this strategy, which is all the more appropriate because

the present work is only an 'Introduction' to the History of Tamil Literature. The survey is accordingly divided into forty-seven chapters averaging seven pages each, and the chapter headings have a telltale ring The aim is analytical inclusiveness, but also avoidance of crushing detail and bewildering complexity. After the admirable opening chapters on 'The Land and the People' and 'The Language and the Literature', one is not obliged to follow strictly the order of the chapters, one is free to read what immediately attracts, to move forward and backward, till the whole fascinating ground has been covered at last Most of the individual chapters have their own unity and sufficiency, whether they are about particular authors, works, or about a group of poems or class of writing Altogether the narrative exudes an impression of speed, amplitude, variety and significant detail By resolved limitation, Mr Arunachalam hasn't given illustrative quotations except in the chapter on Kamban (where he has wisely drawn upon Justice Maharajan's sensitive English rendering), and in a few other contexts While this detracts somewhat from the usefulness of the 'History' to non-Tamil readers, it has made for compactness There are also chapters on the Lexicons, Ballads and Folk-Songs, Tamil Script, and Inscriptions The Modern Period is merely glanced at towards the close of the book, and in fact Mr. Arunachalam isn't quite at home with the newest fashions in writing. On

total view, however, Mr. Arunachalam's book is just what it claims to be. it is an introduction to a great subject, it is broad-based, it is very readable, it is informative and instructive, and above all it is a labour of love and devotion to the cause of Tamil Letters

Mylapore, Madras
14th March 1974

K. R. SRINIVASA IYENGAR

PREFACE

Tamil and Sanskrit, the most ancient languages of India, are as rich as any other ancient language in the world But the glory of Tamil is that unlike the other classical languages, which have ceased to be the common speech of the people, Tamil continues to be one. It is the mother tongue of forty millions of people in Tamilnad, and also of a considerable section of the people living in Ceylon, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, South Africa and Burma There is quite a large number of the Tamil-speaking people in India itself, outside the Tamil area The language embodies an ancient and varied literature and a literary tradition, whose origin is lost in the mists of pre-history Among what is known as the Dravidian group of languages, Tamil is recognized today as the earliest to cultivate a great literature and a noble culture. It is gratifying that it is receiving in the latter half of the twentieth century an increasing recognition among the linguistic scholars of the world.

This book is in the nature of a short introduction to the history of that literature and is intended to acquaint the eager English reader with the wide range of Tamil literature over a period of more than twenty centuries It does not profess to give an exhaustive historical treatment of material, but it does endeavour to give an objective bird's-eye view of the range and variety of Tamil literature, and a brief account of the growth of each genre.

This work is really an offshoot of my larger encyclopaedic history of Tamil literature, of which seven volumes in Tamil covering six centuries (the 10th to the 15th) have already been published and further volumes are going through the press. The detailed historical survey of the entire range of Tamil literature which I made in preparing those volumes has given me a total perspective which has controlled the selection of material given in this work. The primary concern of this work is, not with dates, but with the structure of works and their several trends and the conspectus of literary events I have endeavoured to survey each branch of literature from the beginning to the modern day, utilizing political history (including epigraphic records), cultural phenomena, metrical growth, linguistic pecularities and thought development. Naturally the chapter headings do not follow any chronological order Illustrative translations have not generally been attempted. Avoidable controversial matter has been avoided. Authors belonging to different faiths have contributed to Tamil literature and, if their works are criticized, it is purely from the literary point of view, and not from the religious.

Some earlier books in English on the history of Tamil literature deserve mention in this preface. Simon Casie Chitty's Tamil Plutarch (1859 Jaffna) has given a short and interesting account of the lives of 193 men of letters in the Tamil language arranged in an alphabetical order; it is far from being scientific or historical M. S Purnalingam pillai was the earliest to attempt a real history but historical material available in his days (1929) was scant and

his achievement, though amazing, has become obsolete since, it is yet valuable for the amount of information it gives. Rao Sahib Vaiyapuri pillai's book (1956) is weighted down heavily with a discussion of dates; though most original and scientific in approach, it suffers from the writer's studied attempt to discover a non-Tamil source for everything Tamil; it deals only with the first ten centuries after Christ and is therefore incomplete. The book by the Jesudasans (1961) is more satisfactory, but it suffers from a lack of charitableness of judgement and empathetic perception in matters relating to the great religious experiences of the Tamils T P. Minakshisundaranar's book (1965) is an advance on all its predecessors; but its scope is limited by the exclusion from its purview of grammatical and religious writing, and by the nature of the foreign readers to whom it was mainly intended J. M. Somasundaram Pillai had planned to write a large history in four volumes . he published only the first volume, reaching upto 600 A.D , in 1967. He has devoted greater attention to the translation of poetic pieces than to the discussion of historical trends

A few words on the books written in the Tamil language[1] may not be out of place here K. S. Srinivasa

1 Many books have recently been written with the title 'History of Tamil Literature', but they are all in the nature of 'notes' on prescribed textbooks, being based only on the syllabus in Tamil prescribed for the degree courses in the Universities, here all authors and all works receive only perfunctory treatment and no one of these writers had obviously set out to write a history at all.

Pillai of Tanjavur, wrote and published his *Tamil Varalaru* volume I and part I of volume II in 1927[1] He employed the scientific historical method but the published parts stop short at 1000 A D For original literary criticism, accuracy and proper marshalling of historical material, insight into the times, catholicity of taste and width of treatment, there is no book to equal his. But the source material available in his day was not much and yet his book remains even today a marvel of original writing Other books on the subject in the Tamil language are wholly unsatisfactory K Subramanya Pillai (1930) wrote mostly from memory and his history suffers from several inadequacies The short book by V Selvanayakam of Ceylon (1951) is a good book in that it has an original approach to the epochs of Tamil literary history It divides the history into six periods – the Sangham, the post–Sangham, the Pallava, the Chola, the Nayak and the European periods. This is a political classification which cannot but result in a great amount of over-lapping and cannot obviously give a correct perspective of literary trends. Some books have been published

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1 Pillai was a giant both in his pleader's profession and in the field of Tamil literary criticism and was a terror in both, because of his sharp tongue, he was a man who could not suffer fools. He had written up the second part of Volume II completing the History, a thief broke into his house one night and carried away the cash box in which he had kept this manuscript also Not knowing its value, the thief would of course have thrown it away The author had no more patience to re-write it and he passed away leaving the published parts incomplete.

by the Annamalai University but they are neither comprehensive nor scientific, only the one on *Tolkappiyam* appears satisfactory

Upto the dawn of the twentieth century, literature in Tamilnad was mostly in the shape of poetry In a broader sense, poetry is the liveliest expression of the personality of a nation The Tamil peoples, even in the remote past of more than 2500 years ago, had a living faith in God, in the light of which they tackled life's variegated problems Some critics lament the fact that our poets have not sung any poem on Nature-in-itself but then they overlook the fact that Nature is only a backdrop to the human drama and all that man can sing of Nature can only be subjective Poetry in the remote past had only one aim – to reflect life as it was and as it should be To the Tamilian, art has a higher purpose – not only to give joy to life but also to ennoble and elevate it. Every ruling prince in the ancient Tamilnad had a floral emblem. The correlation of different love moods in poetry to the five physiographical regions and the celebration of even martial acts with floral symbols argues an uncommon attunement of Tamil society with nature The intimate treatment of nature found in *Sangham* poetry is unparallelled in the whole range of world literature

The discerning reader will find many unfamiliar byways of literature explored in this book Many subjects, which have not received the attention of lilerary historians, have been given detailed conside-

ration here As illustrations, we may mention the sections on *Isai* and *Natakam*, *Vira Saiva* and *Vedanta* writing, the *Puranas*, the *Siddhas* and the *Ballads and Folk-songs* The section on *Other writing* is on a subject which has never been thought worthy of consideration by scholars till now The sections on *Inscriptions* and *Script* have a definite place in any account of language or literature, although both of them have never been so much as mentioned in the historical treatises till now.

This book deals with the different aspects of Tamil literature upto the opening of this century only. New genres have sprung into being in the twentieth century but they have not been taken up for consideration here

Sometimes the same subject may be found treated in two or more places, under different subject groups, for example, mention of Andal is made in the section on the Vaisnava canon, and again in the sections on Minor poems-II and on Women poets Some overlapping is unavoidable, because of the pattern of treatment adopted

Commentators of a thousand years ago had dwelt at length on the existence of two earlier Tamil academies in two capital cities of the Pandiyas situated in a stretch of land south of Cape Comorin and now submerged by the sea However, there seems to be a school of thought now which holds the existence of the academies to be a myth, because some geologists do not concede that any land existed south of Cape Comorin We should remember that geology is a developing science and the scientists have not pronounced the last word on the subject yet. A long

stretch of land is also said to have existed connecting Madagascar with our west coast and going on east upto the Malayan archipelago I have just quoted in this book the prevalent opinion about the academies Even allowing for exaggeration on the part of the commentators, there is no reason to dismiss their entire account as mere myth and a product of the imagination Adiyarkku-nallar mentions seven groups of seven territories[1] and says that these as well as many hill tracts such as Kumari and Kollam, forest, river and city upto the northern Kumari peak, were swallowed up by the sea This is not the place to examine the correctness of those remarks but I would content myself with stating that all this could not be the invention of any brain however fertile, and then there was no purpose in making such an invention

Tamil Literature covers a period of more than twenty centuries and its history witnesses for the most part a continuous evolution of the literature, in grammar, in expression, in forms and in thought content The Tamil people, like every other people in the world, have experienced many upheavals, revolutions and wars Many invasions, infiltrations and dominations have occurred, but these have been less in the Tamil country than in the north of India, because Tamilnad is a peninsular area, insulated by the sea on three sides and foreign marauders who came by land could hardly penetrate far enough into the south Yet, it is a

1 The seven Tenga nadu, Madurai nadu, Munpalai nadu, Pinpalai nadu, Kunra nadu, Kunakarai nadu and Kurumpanai nadu.

marvel that it has preserved unbroken a tradition covering many millennia, the surprising thing is that the literature of two thousand years ago can still be read and enjoyed by the Tamils of today and can still remain a source of inspiration to them

The age of many great authors is yet a vexing question, but I have ventured to fix the dates with, I hope, a fair degree of accuracy Those dates can be found in the centurywise chronological table of books and authors appended to this work

A note on the scheme of transliteration and a glossary of the Tamil and Sanskrit terms used in this book have been added It is hoped that acquaintance with this glossary will be helpful to the lay reader

I am thankful to Justice S. Maharajan for permission to include in this book a lengthy extract from his admirable monograph on *Kamban* and to Mr R Nagaswami for his help in revising the section on the Tamil script Dr. K R Srinivasa Iyengar has enriched the book with an illuminating foreword Words are inadequate to express my thanks to him

Tiruchitrambalam
Tamil New Year's Day
Ananda-Chitrai-1

M ARUNACHALAM

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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY OF TAMIL LITERATURE

THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

THE LAND

The southern part of India is known from the very ancient days as the Tamil land Its limits from historical times are Vēnkatam (modern Tiruppati) in the north, Cape Comorin in the south[1] and the present Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea in the east and the west respectively Tamilian literary tradition says that there was a wide stretch of land south of Cape Comorin where Pāndiyan cities flourished, many hills and rivers existed and many divisions of territories also existed, and that the language was in a highly cultivated state All this is said to have been deluged by the sea in times long past Even in the present day, the restricted territorial limit no longer applies Vēnkatam in the north has gone to the Andhra, and the west coast has gone to the Kerala states But it has to be admitted that these were the boundaries before the evolution of the other branches of the Dravidian group into independent languages

Views have been expressed by eminent western scholars to the effect that the South of India would have been the cradle of the human race and that the peninsular India is today substantially as it existed before the beginnings of life The present inhabitants of Tamilnad, the Tamilians, are considered by most to be indigenous to the soil, they had not migrated to this land from any other area

It is but natural that persons with linguistic or racial bias seek to belittle such claims made in literary legends It should be remembered that those who penned down these legends had no particular desire to assign their people or culture a remote past Modern prejudices did not exist then, and the ancient writers merely noted down for posterity, what they had heard and known, and what they feared would be forgotten and would pass into oblivion The commentary of Adiyarkku nallar on Silappadhikāram[2] shows us his great earnestness and sincerity in handing down knowledge and history, tradition and culture to posterity, we also see how sad he was feeling that a great heritage and a great many cultural institutions had died and gone into disuse in his day We see therefore no reason to think that writers such as he were weaving mere fantastic stories to glorify the land and its people The neo-modern criticism in this regard is therefore unwarranted when it questions the veracity of their statements

We do not wish to enter into any controversy here regarding the Dravidians and the Aryans We would simply state here that even at the time of the earliest recorded history of the land and its literature, the two groups had intermingled to form the group which we now call the Tamilian

We learn that from the very early days the country was divided into three territorial units–the Sēras in the west, the Pāndiyas in the south, and the Cholas in the east and the north, ruled by these princes They had their capital cities at Vanji, Madurai and Puhār respectively. This division existed till about the 3rd

century A D, when a new dynasty named the Pallavas came up in the north, with Kānci as its capital The Pallava area was known as the Tondainād and gradually it expanded towards the south, very soon completely over-running the Chōla territory

Though we have many legends connected with the ruling houses of Tamilnad, we have no connected history Karikāla of the Chōla dynasty was the most famous monarch and his memory is now cherished by posterity by the many irrigation systems he inaugurated Neduncеliyan of the Pāndiya dynasty and Senkuttuvan of the Sēras are equally famous figures All of them were great patrons of art and letters and they freely gave to bards and singers One ruler is said to have fed the warring forces in the Mahābhārata war [3] Many had performed vedic sacrifices.[4] No king is spoken of as a tyrant, all were benevolent rulers who held justice and the good of all as their goals in life The ancient kings seem to have practised monogamy Petty chiefs had sway over small domains and they also vied with one another in helping the people, particularly bards and artistes Valour in battle and chivalry were equally considered as virtues by all classes of the people

The rivers Kāvēri of the Chōlas and the Vaigai and the Porunai of the Pāndiyas had acquired great literary and cultural fame All the three states together constituted the Tamilnad and had considerable overseas trade Puhār or Kāvērippattinam (Chōla), Korkai and Tondi (Pāndiya), and Musiri (Sēra) were the important sea ports of the respective areas Trade was carried on with Greece, Rome,

Egypt and Arabia in the west, and China and the Eastern Archipelago in the east The princes had a large maritime fleet and these, in the days of the later Chōla monarchs, helped to conquer other territories and spread there Tamilian culture and civilization, and the Tamilian religion and way of life

The Tamilian civilization had been, as it has been everywhere in the world, a river-based civilization Tradition and geography credit the land with many rivers such as the Pālāru, Pennāru, Kāvēri, Vaigai and Porunai in the east, and the Periyāru on the west coast Though all the rivers exist, it is only the Kāvēri that has been 'feeding its childern with its thousand arms' (meaning the scores of irrigation channels which had been laid out in the course of the last two thousand years) The Kāvēri is the Ponni, the Golden Lady, celebrated in legend and song as the giver of all wealth to her people through agriculture.

The land has specific monsoon periods which help in the flow of water along its rivers for irrigation, and a good amount of fertility has been maintained in the soil for many scores of centuries

THE PEOPLE

Monarchy was the form of government. The kings had their own separate flags and court bards, and maintained the fourfold armies There were frequent wars among the kings but the highest moral code was practised in battles and in warfare Even in wars, the fighting forces never harmed cattle, women, the enlightened persons, the sick, children and similiar others Mechanical engineering contrivances also helped in warfare.

Valour and honour were considered more precious than the very life The rulers were invariably the upholders of honour and justice A regular tax was paid to the king for the benefit of his administration.

The Pāndiyan pearls were famous throughout the world Tamilian textiles were the most coveted articles of merchandise in the west Metal coins were in use, the insignia of the princes was stamped on them Customs levies were made on the incoming articles Fairness was the keynote in all the people's transactions, such as trade.

There was survey of land The sciences of mathematics and astronomy were in a very developed state Medicine was a specialised science. Architecture also seems to have been well advanced. Drainage schemes were in vogue in large cities.

The family was the unit of all social life and so progeny was held to be vital to one's own salvation The birth of a son in the family was a great event. Women had equal rights with men Chivalry was the rule and women were held in great esteem, they were not treated as chattels, as in the degenerate later day society

Marriage was considered a solemn union which nothing could break A happy householder's life was the ideal. Though polygamy existed, monogamy was the rule Chastity was considered the noblest of a woman's virtues Women excelled in music and dance, which were at the peak of their glory then Light games like balls were set apart for women, while men took part in serious games, sometimes dangerous also,

Mechanical swimming pools, public parks and the like were there for recreation, for men as well as women Families took part in important monthly festivities of a social as well as a religious nature.

In the matter of dress, silk and wool were also in use besides cotton Gold and gems were in use for ornaments Mud pots and brass vessels were used in the house

It was the duty of the parent to bring up his child as a noble citizen Learning was greatly respected Education was in a well advanced state, the teacher had the greatest esteem in society Elders were always respected

Though castes existed, they were not rigid In arts and letters, in love of God, in the capacity for action, and in affording opportunities for worldly advancement through one's own effort, caste was no bar

Drink and gambling existed in all ranks of society but both were considered vices and there was a regular campaign against their practice

Friendship and loyalty to friends were held to be great virtues Truthfulness, a sense of gratitude and respect to elders were greatly cultivated Agriculture was the main stay of the people Manual labour was considered important and the spirit of the dictum 'work is worship' ruled the society then Righteousness, fear of God and service to fellow beings were the most cherished virtues The sense of patriotism was high, although it was territorially very limited.

Religious observances and festivals were important parts of the people's lives Festivities were always accompanied by music and dance Feeding the poor and the needy was considered the greatest of virtues The religious rituals were well organised Great reverence was shown to the brahmin People believed in a Higher Power which governed their destinies and believed in *karmā* We meet with the worship of Visnu, Muruga, Śiva and Śakti very often, but mention of the Jina or the Buddha is absent

References

1 Preface to Tolkappiyam by Panamparanar

2 Silappadhikaram, Chapter 8, Venir-kathai Adiyarkku nallar's commentary on lines 1-2

3 Purananuru, verse 2

4 Pandiyan palyagasalai mudukudumi-p-Peruvaludi, Raja-suyam vetta Peru narkilli, Karikala and Nalankilli verses 15, 16, 224, 400 of Purananuru

THE TAMIL LANGUAGE AND ITS LITERATURE

THE LANGUAGE

The earliest book on the Tamil language and literature is considered to be *Tolkāppiyam* Ignoring many fantastic claims for its date as some thousand years before Christ, we may be factually correct if we assume that its date was somewhere between 500 B C. and 1 B C That Tolkāppiyar postulates many linguistic theories and discusses at length the subject matter of poetry, poetics, rhetoric and the like and says that the thoughts were expressed by earlier grammarians,[1] signifies that the language and its literature were in a greatly developed state long before him The only language which can claim to have a very ancient past, as ancient as that claimed for Sanskrit, is Tamil All the north Indian languages of today branched off from Prākrit, the spoken form of Sanskrit, much later in point of time The three main South Indian languages, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam branched off probably from a parent stock long after Tamil, Malayalam branched off directly from Tamil, a thousand years ago Local variations and the proportion of the admixture of Sanskrit are responsible for the variations in the languages

Sanskrit influence has pervaded the Tamil country even in the days of *Tolkāppiyam*, in which also its influences are traceable.[2] The Tamil language

possesses more effective vowels and a lesser number of consonants The latter may perhaps be inadequate to express some aspirated and softered sounds as in Sanskrit, but they had proved quite adequate to express Tamil sounds and thoughts The language of *Tolkāppiyam* and still earlier days had proved through the centuries adequate enough to express all the thoughts which the Tamilian thinker had the need to think and express In short, the Tamil language had enough vitality, depth and width to stand on its own, along with any ancient living language of the world, with the power of expressing the most subtle thoughts of the human mind Technology is something new to every language, and terms are invented in the stride of science Such terms can also be absorbed and adapted in the Tamil language and also invented here as occasion demands

A large admixture of Sanskrit words found its way into the spoken and the written language by the 11th century A D through the exponents of the Vaisnava philosophy, and later by those of the Jain school Muslim invasions and the British domination had their own share in infiltrating foreign words and forms into the language But Tamil has absorbed them all and still today marches ahead, without in any way losing any part of its native genius and vitality The Tamil language is an agglutinative language, case endings for nouns and verbal inflexions for tense, place, gender and number are added on to the root, which remains almost the same This is the secret of the language of the *Kural* and similar works written twenty centuries and fifteen centuries ago, being still easy of comprehension to the literate Tamilian Syntax has not changed,

LITERATURE

The glory of Tamil as that of Sanskrit is that it has had an unbroken and continuous history of literary production for the last twenty centuries Historians say that the *brāhmi* script was used for the earliest writing followed by what is known as the *vatteluttu*, which in time gave place to the modern script The Vaisnava theologians wrote a style employing a majority of Sanskrit words, written in the *grantha* script of the Sanskrit language, it was called the *mani-pravāla* The language was however not corrupted by such writing, which after a few centuries almost ceased to exist as a linguistic force

Poetic form had been the expression of all literature in Tamil from the earliest times All books were written in verse Manuals of grammar, peculiar to only a few languages like Sanskrit and Tamil, were all written in verse Not only that Any matter that was worth-while was penned down in verse Lexicons, medical books, astrological manuals, mathematical books, architectural treatises and many similar others were written down in verse

The earliest types of verse were four[3], but two of them somehow fell into disuse - the *vanjippā* and the *kalippā;* only the *venbā* and the *āsiriyappā* continue from the earliest period to this day Many variations in the metre occurred of course over the centuries Popular songs required still greater variations and the language was elastic enough to accommodate all such variations.

Early Tamil literature was classified as *aham* (pertaining to love themes) and *puram* (other themes) but such a classification gradually fell into disuse The entire poetry of the Sangham age falls into this classification But some centuries later, the two get dovetailed Similiarly also, the concept of the five natural regions *kurinji*, *mullai*, *marutam*, *neidal* and *pālai*, generally pertaining to the love themes of the earlier poetry, gets intermingled We hear of mut-Tamil, dealing with literary Tamil, music and drama (*iyal*, *isai* and *nātakam* but only the first category has been handed down to us in a continuous stream, *isai* had a chequered course through history, while drama seems to have been almost snubbed out, even at the very commencement of Tamil literary history. Grammar which originally dealt with orthography, etymology and topics of poetry, later on took on prosody and poetics, and rhetoric also, as separate branches

The beginnings of Tamil literature were only in the form of stray and occasional verses, continuous or connected verses were rare Ethical dictums were coined by many writers but they were all in the nature of only isolated verses There are some long poems among them such as the various *ārruppadais*, which are narratives within a limited range, but here each is one single complete poem, not a string of verses There have been group poems like the *Kalittohai*, but here also the group is not a continuous narrative, each verse in the group is an isolated verse *Silappadhikāram* is the first continuous narrative poem, it is in the *āsiriyam* metre followed by two others in the same metre, which very soon gave place to the more elastic, moving and melodious *viruttam* metre.

The *viruttam* was a copy from the Śaiva and the Vaisnava canon, where the metre was employed in strings of continuous verses often 10 or 11, constituting a poem in praise of a shrine A large volume of ethical dictum was coined by many poets during the period between the Sangham poetry and the later epic poetry, in the *venbā* metre All of them were in the nature of isolated verses in the *venbā* metre, which by now had to compete with the *viruttam* for popularity Of course the *viruttam* won, because of its easy movement, harmony of sound, regular measured feet, and the mechanical aids of rhyme, alliteration and assonance , more specifically by its easy adaptability to singing The *viruttam* was relatively freer than the *venbā* and more loose The place secured by the *viruttam* during the days of the rise of the epic continues to be occupied by it to this day.

During this period, there was imperial rule in the land and royal patronage was available to many writers. When the imperial dynasties died out, continuous long narratives gave place to shorter minor poems of diverse character in praise of God or man Men of letters turned their attention from original writing to the writing of glosses on grammatical treatises, on epic poetry, ethical works and so on Then came philosophical literature – Śaiva, Vaisnava, Vēdānta and occasionally Jaina also By now many religious centres came to be established and these encouraged the writing of further canonical and expository writing in verse and prose

Such was the general trend of the literary output at a time when the Muslims invaded the land.

Religious writing was intensified and we find crops of *purānas* in scores, and several new types of minor poems in hundreds, being written. The advent of the British rule introduced printing, and prose writing developed Every thing was going on in a humdrum way till there came political awakening in the land. The struggle for independence started and ushered in an era of nationalistic poetry, with the result that Tamil has come into its own in the affairs of men

References

1 Cf Seyyuliyal 1, 2, 38, 39, 41, 60 and many other sutras in this section and in several others

2 Cf Preface Reference to Aindra vyakarana, Solladhikaram, 9 5

3 Tolkappiyam, Poruladhikaram, Seyyuliyal 101

THE TAMIL SANGHAM

Sangham is a Sanskrit word meaning a gathering; here it is used in the sense of the gathering of Tamil men of letters - a learned assembly, an academy, or even what we now understand by the term university We have any number of legends referring to three such academies, the first at a south Madurai and the second at Kapātapuram, both of them deluged by the sea in pre-historic times, and the third at the site of the present city of Madurai, the north Madurai The commentator on *Iraiyanār Kalaviyal*[1] is the first writer to give an elaborate account of the three academies, Adiyārkku nallār repeats the same particulars in his commentary on *Silappadhikāram*[2] But the very word Sangham is not found in *Tolkāppiyam*, since it rules that the letter *ca* (the first letter in Sangham) cannot occur in the beginning of a word[3]

Kapātapuram, the head-quarters of the second Sangham is mentioned by Vālmīki[4] as the capital city of contemporary Pāndiyas. Muranjiyur Mudināgarāya, author of the second verse in the *Puranānūru*, is mentioned as a poet of the second Sangham[5] But the poems of the Sangham age which we have today do not mention the sangham at all The earliest reference to the sangham occurs in a song of Saint Appar,[6] where he says that the Lord of Madurai appeared before the sangham in the guise of a poet and caused a purse of gold to be handed over to

Dharmi; this refers to a legend connected with the second verse of the anthology *Kuruntohai*, which says that no flower's fragrance can equal that of a young maiden's tresses The Cinnamanūr plates of Rājasimha Pāndiya mention the fact of the establishment of (ie, the patronage extended to) the Madurāpuri Tamil Sangham [7] Hence the existence of the Sangham was beyond doubt a historical fact

Lord Śiva, the presiding deity of Madurai, in the person of a poet by name Iraiyanār,[8] is said to have presided over the first Sangham Agastya had been said to be a poet and master who presided over the deliberations of the second academy He wrote a grammar on the three branches of Tamil, in his name *Agattiyam*, which was the guide for the first Sangham, of his twelve disciples, Tolkāppiyar wrote a grammar in his name which was the guide for the second Sangham, of the two, Agattiyam had ceased to exist even two thousand years ago, while *Tolkāppiyam* is today available in full *Iraiyanār kalaviyal* mentions in great detail the number of poets in the three sanghams, the books produced by them, the number of the Pāndiya patrons, the number of years each academy existed, and so on [9] Although there is no means of verifying the particulars given therein, we have to concede the fact that such academies existed, even by the mere fact of the great development seen in the language, its literature, its poems and conventions, and the treatment and development of the subject matter of poetry even in the third Sangham, two thousand years ago. The Tamils, even through the well known period of the last twenty centuries, did not

attach any importance to correct historical information. Factual truths were nothing to them when compared to the poetic and religious truths

Aḍiyārkku nallār says that the epic *Udayanan kathai, (Perum kathai)* was a fine product, carefully worked out and finished by a deep study of the works of the second sangham,[10] a critical study of this book bears out his statement and tells us that this book is beyond doubt the result of a careful study of the earlier texts and of the people also Hence, ignoring the legendary exaggeration of ages and time, there is nothing improbable in accepting the statement that two academies had flourished for a large number of years under the patronage of the Pāndiyas, long before the period of the Sangham poetry which is now available to us. The three academies might have been continuous, the distinction as three being necessitated probably by natural catastrophies such as a deluge.

The statements that Śiva and Kumāra participated in the deliberations of the first two sanghams and that these lasted for 4440 and 3700 years may be legend, but the very existence of the sanghams is not legend. The Kalabhra interregnum in Madurai between 250 and 550 A D. had so completely obliterated all evidence of earlier academies and such well developed cultural and literary Tamil institutions and traditions,[11] that any statement made in the later centuries is taken as mere legend. Of course false legends had also gathered round true facts, such as the existence of a floating sangham seat on the golden lotus tank which would accept only the highest in poetry and

push out the rest, and which in fact did push out all the other poets to give room to *Kural*, much to the chagrin of the ancient Sangham poets themselves

Writers had greatly emphasized an insignificant incident that one Vajranandi established a Jain Sangham at Madurai by the end of the 5th century A. D , and had sought to discredit the earlier Tamil Sangham itself. We have absolutely no reference to this Jain Sangham anywhere in Tamil Literature It is quite possible that it was founded under the Kalabhras to offset the wholly indigenous and ancient influence of the Tamil Sanghams, but it has not achieved anything except to serve as a convenient handle to some scholars to confuse the issue.[12] We have to take the detailed, factual and legendary statements of *Kalaviyal* commentator and Adiyārkku nallār as statements calculated not only to give a factual history, but also to offset the interloping idea of a dramila sangham of the Jains at Madurai.

Notes and References

1. *Iraiyanar kalaviyal* edited by CR. Namasivaya Mudaliyar.
2. *Silappadhikaram,* chapter 8, *Venir kathai,* Adiyarkku nallar's commentary on lines 1–2
3. *Tolkappiyam,* Book I, chapter 2 62.
4. Valmiki Ramayana, Kishkinda kanda, chapter 41 verse 18 '*Tato hemamayam divyam mukta mani vibhushitam, Yuktam kavatam Pandyanam gata drakshyatha vanarah*' Govindaraja, the commentator interprets *kavatam* as the capital city of the Pandiyas.

5. *Iraiyanar kalaviyal*, CR Namasivaya Mudaliyar's edition, Sutra 1, pages 8-9 Vide Adiyarkkunallar quoted above, Dr. Swaminatha Ayyar's edition of *Silappadhikaram* 1927, page 230.

6. Saint Appar, *Devaram* Book 3, verse 3 of Tirupputtur Tiru Tandakam.

7. *Peruntohai* by M Raghava Ayyangar 1936, verse 892 line 29.

8 The term Iraiyanar means Lord God

9 *Iraiyanar kalaviyal* pages 8-9 Vide also the table on page 283 in my History of Tamil Literature, 10th Century (Tamil)

10 Vide his preface to his commentary, page 8 of Swaminatha Ayyar's edition 1927

11 Vide T V Sadasiva Pandarattar, *Pandiyar Varalaru* (Tamil) 1966, page 35

12. Professor Vaiyapuri Pillai eloquently speaks of the dramila sangham without subtantial evidence and says that Madurapuri Sangham of this inscription might well have been this one He has forgotten the fact that the Pandiyas who overthrew the Kalabhias were at that time ardent Saivas and anything Jain would have been anathema to them Besides, the Vajranandi sangham was a religious body and was not a literary academy

MUT - TAMIL

From very early times, Tamil literature has been considered to have had three divisions – *Iyal*, *Isai* and *Nātakam* *Iyal* stands for the subject matter of all literary composition, *Isai* stands for music and musical composition, and *Nātakam* for dance and drama and dramatic composition Agastya of the legendary first sangam is supposed to have written a treatise on the three divisions [1] No work of his is available now and we are unable to extricate him from the realm of legend But in later gloss-writing we find many references to mut-Tamil and extracts from mut-Tamil books Hence the concept of mut-Tamil is real.

Iyal Tamil is all speech and writing, including poetry In this sense all the Tamil literature that has come into existence from the pre-Christian era down to the present day is *Iyal* Tamil Tolkāppiyar, who wrote the first available grammar for the language, dealt only with *Iyal* Tamil He limited his writing to the three parts – orthography, etymology and the subject matter of literature, later writers had extended the last branch to two more parts – prosody and poetics, and rhetoric, grammar had since come to be known as having these five parts, the *Aindilakkanam* But no one of the stature of Tolkāppiyar had attempted all the five parts, although there were some very good books which dealt with individual parts His book remains the best book on the three parts even to this day

Silappadhikāram is hailed as the only ancient book which treats of mut-Tamil Many chapters in the book having the title *kuravai*, *vari* and *mālai* belong to the branch of music (*isai*) Besides, the author himself makes several references in his long poem to the many aspects of *isai* [2] However, the tradition of this *isai*, which was perhaps in vogue at the time of the Agastya of the first sangam and even at the time of the last sangham, seems to have faded out later *Paripādal*, a late work of the third sangham, mentions musical notations, instruments and composers for its verses The term *paripādal* is one which was applied in those days to musical composition Adiyārkku nallār deals very elaborately with music, composition, singing instruments and allied subjects, quoting extensively many passages from works of the past, and also regretfully mentioning the fact that most of them had been lost even in his day [3] Even the books which were available to him in the 12th century have unfortunately become extinct since then

Still greater is the contribution of *Silappadhikāram* to the knowledge of the dance and drama of the period The chapter dealing with the first public dance performance of Mādhavi gives detailed information of the great part played by dance in the cultural and social life of the higher classes of those days The commentator writes in detail about all the features involved – the dancer, the dance instructor, the music teacher, the composer, the drummer, the flute player, the *yāl*-master, the stage, the *talaikkol* (post of honour awarded to the dancer), and the manner of dancing. His exclusive elaboration on music is not available, because his commentary on the *kānalvari* chapter dealing with music has been lost.

The concept of mut-Tamil can thus be seen to be a very ancient one, in later days even when the divisions *isai* and *nātakam* had been lost or fallen into disuse, we find poets referring to mut-Tamil purely as a matter of tradition Kambar mentions mut-Tamil *turai*[4] and Avvai speaks of Sangha-Tamil *mūnru* [5]

As already mentioned, only *iyal* Tamil had grown through the centuries, in variety and depth and in volume, *isai* Tamil and *nātaka* Tamil had not had such growth, because perhaps of the extinction of all traditions of the sangham in later years Jñāna Sambandha is a lone brave figure who vigorously upheld the cause of music, both by his singing in the temples and by his devotional songs set to music No doubt the songs of the other Śaiva Ācāryas and Vaisnava Ālvārs are also set to music, but Sambandha was the only hymnologist who militantly took up the cause of music. Music and drama were firmly suppressed by Kalabhras, temporary overlords in Madurai during the 3rd to the 6th centuries A D , and it was Sambandha who restored *isai* Tamil back in the land to all its glory Later it was taken up by Arunagiri nāthar in the 14-15th century and by music composers like Muttu Tāndavar, from the 18th century

Ñātaka Tamil, forgotten for a long time, had some flicker of life in the days of Rājarāja I[7] and Kulōttunga I[8], when their lives and deeds of valour were dramatised and enacted in the temples But even that flicker died out, until dramas on the western model captured the minds of the people and they came to be enacted from the 19th century Hundreds of dramas in which singing was an integral part were written

and enacted in this period, covering religious and social themes. But the glory of *nātaka* Tamil as a division of mut-Tamil had died after the writing of *Silappadhikāram* and no one ever attempted to recapture that tradition, because all related literary material had been irredeemably lost, including the tradition

References

1 Adiyarkku nallar's preface to his commentary on the *Padikam* of *Silappadhikaram*

2 *Silappadhikaram*, chapters 3, 7 and 8

3 Adiyarkku nallar, commentary on chapter 6

4 *Ramayanam* (9th century), Balakandam verse 5, Rajam's edition 1958, turai – division

5 Invocatory verse to *Nalvali* (12th century), munru – three

6 Vide *Tiruppuhal* of Arunagiri nathar and *Padangal* by Muttuttandavar

7 Annual Report on S I Epigraphy for 1930-31, para 12, South Indian inscriptions, Vol II No 67

8. Inscription 198 of 1919.

IYAL TAMIL
– TAMIL GRAMMAR

The first division of Tamil as we have seen is *iyal* Tamil, Tamil as it is spoken and written, this is literary Tamil All literature constitutes *iyal* Tamil, and grammar[1] is that which speaks of the general rules governing this division The earliest Tamil grammar is said to be *Agattiyam* by Sage Agastiya, who had written on all the three divisions of Tamil It was the source of authority for the first sangham but in the deluges that occurred, it is said to have been lost, along with a very vast body of literature which preceded it

Tolkāppiyar is said to have composed the treatise on grammar in his name in the second Sangham,[2] and it is a miracle that it is available to us in full even today, while many a book, composed at a much later date, has been lost He divided his subject into three parts - *eluttu* (orthography), *sol* (etymology) and *porul* (subject matter of poetry or literature) A vast body of writing on each part came into existence in the centuries after him During the Kalabhra interregnum at Madurai, the *porul* part seems to have been suppressed, this gave rise to the production of *Iraiyanār kalaviyal*, on only one section of the original – namely the *kalaviyal* or clandestine or pre-marital love A beautiful commentary was written on it immediately

and a very fine legend also grew about it The *Kalaviyal* departs in many ways from the original, as is only to be expected Its author (Iraiyanār) had evidently no access to the original *Tolkāppiyam*, and he had to write it anew, from a general knowledge of the subject, we need not presume that he knowingly deviated from the other The commentary is written in a wonderful prose which is still studied with admiration by all scholars, it is also the earliest piece of extant Tamil prose

The 8th and the 9th centuries appear to have been a period of hectic activity on grammar writing, a second Agastiya, a second Tolkāppiyar and many other disciples of Agastiya lived during this period and composed scores of treatises on all the branches of Tamil and very much enlarged the scope of *Tolkāppiyam*, but all their works are lost [3] To give one example, a manual on *puram*, on the 12 divisions of this subject was written under the title *Panniru patalam*,[4] the Twelve Chapters, but it is also lost In the next century (9th) Ayyan Āritan wrote his treatise, *Purapporul venbā mālai*, as an adaptation of *Panniru patalam*, his book is available and it has also an ancient gloss written on it. At about the same period another book on the *ahapporul*, by name the *Tamil neri vilakkam*, was written and we have only a fragment of it [5] The available fragments of the various books on prosody and poetics, written in the 8th and the 9th centuries, were collected together in the name of *Panniru pāttiyal*,[6] in the next century. The century after that witnessed the writing of two books on prosody by Amitasāgara, *Yāpparunkalam*[7] and its *Kārikai*,[8] both have elaborate commentaries written

on them by the author's own disciples; the *Kārikai* is the popular treatise that is studied by students of Tamil prosody even today

The *nūrpā (āsiriyappā)* was the metre employed in the grammatical works till then For the first time, Amitasāgara breaks the convention and writes his shorter manual in the *kattalai kalitturai* metre, which was later evolved from the *kalippā,* and in which the syllables in each line are measured as 16 and 17. Later writers begin to employ the *venbā* and the *viruttam* metres

Vīrasōliyam[9] was the next work and it deals with the five branches and it is indeed an innovation on *Tolkāppiyam* Besides its three divisions, this book adds two more – prosody and rhetoric, and the five have since come to be known as the *panca laksana*, the five-fold grammar Dandi's rhetoric[10] is the next important work, written in the next century (12th) Gunavīra-pandita, at the same period wrote his *Nēminātām*[11] on orthography and etymology, and his *Vaccanandi mālai*[12] on poetics Nārkavirāja nambi wrote his *Ahapporul vilakkam*[13] on *aham,* and it is the most widely read book today on that subject Pavanandi's *Nannūl*[14] (the good book) is the most important work of this period; it deals with only the first two divisions It is quite a valuable book and it has even superceded *Tolkāppiyam* Minor works had been written during the later centuries till the 17th, when Vaidyanātha Dēśika wrote his most compendious work, *Ilakkana vilakkam*[15] on the five branches *Tonnūl viḷakkam* and *Muttuvīriyam* were written in the

next two centuries, but the fact remains that *Nannūl* holds the field and will continue to hold it for many years to come

We should bear in mind that rules of grammar are not written down as classical textbooks in verse, in the modern European languages, only Tamil and Sanskrit have made the study of grammar also a science

Notes and References

1 *Ilakkanam* (grammar), signifying the *lakshana* of poetry and other literature, seems to be purely a Tamilian concept, this significance is not found in early Sanskrit

2 Adiyarkku nallar's commentary on the padikam of *Silappadhikaram*

3 *Vide* my forthcoming History of Tamil Literature, 8th century and 9th century (Tamil)

4 *Vide* the prefatory verse on the *Purapporul venbamalai* Dr Swaminatha Ayyar's edition 1953, page 1

5 *Tamil neri vilakkam* edited by Dr Swaminatha Ayyar, 1937

6 Edited by R Raghava Ayyangar, 1951, Madurai Tamil Sangam

7 Edited by S Bhavanandam Pillai, in two volumes 1916 and 1917

8 Edited by Govindaraja Mudaliar, 1934

9 Ed ibid, Bhavanandar Academy, 1942

10 *Dandi alankaram* edited by V M Satakopa ramanuja-chariar, 1962.

11 *Neminatam* edited by Govindaraja Mudaliyar, 1964

12 *Vaccanandi malai* edited by Sennakesavalu Naidu, 1908

13 *Nambi ahapporul*, Madurai Tamil Sangham 1926

14. *Nannul*- Mayilainathar 1918, Sankara Namasivayar 1935 · both edited by Dr Swaminatha Ayyar

15. *Ilakkana vilakkam*, edited by Damodaram Pillai, 1890.

TOLKĀPPIYAM

The book perhaps takes its name from the author, Tolkāppiyar The title means the ancient classic, this is certainly a fact It is a grammatical treatise, and so naturally it was preceded by centuries of a rich heritage of literary output and tradition *Tolkāppiyam* lays down rules for the different types of poetic composition, these rules were of course extracted from books which existed earlier than the author.

Tolkāppiyam treats of only *iyal* Tamil It is divided into three books – *eluttu* (orthography), *sol* (etymology) and *porul* (subject matter) Some scholars are fond of tracing most of the contents of the first two books to Sanskrit sources, but the third book, *porul*, is wholly the author's own – in conception, classification, and elaboration Each of the books contains nine chapters, perhaps the author did plan the books to be uniform in size and arrangement The number of *nūrpā* in the books is 483, 464 and 652 respectively.

Tradition says that *Tolkāppiyam* was published in the court of Nilam taru tiruvir Pāndiya, when Atankōttāsān presided, Panampāranār wrote the introduction or commendatory verse for the book Both Atankōttāsān and Panampāranār, along with Tolkāppiyar, were students of Agastya Many centuries later, another writer composed a general preface to the book Panampāranār's introduction

says that Tolkāppiyar was well versed in the *Aindra-vyākarana* of Sanskrit, that book is not available, but *Tolkāppiyam* clearly indicates that its author was familiar with the Sanskrit rules on grammar He has made rules in his book for absorbing Sanskrit words [1]

The first book deals with letters. The classes of the letters, the place of the letters, the place of origin of the sounds, and the coalescence of letters when words come together form the subject of the nine sections of this book The definition of the units of sound for the various types of letters in this book is a valuable contribution to this subject The concept of an *u*, shorter than the short *u* is equally important

The second book deals with words. Its nine sections deal with the class of words (denoting higher or lower beings or things), gender and conventions, the cases and their import, the vocative case in particular, exceptions, then words of action, the particle and adjectives and adverbs, the last section hereof deals with the four kinds of words – the common or natural words, borrowed words, indigenous literary words and words of Sanskrit origin, and their significance He mentions the Sen-Tamil territory as twelve, these are not clearly known now. The three ruling dynasties are also referred to Tolkāppiyar confined borrowed words to the twelve regional territories,[2] later the author of *Nannūl* added the traditional eighteen territories also (excluding the Sen-Tamil territory).

The third book is *Porul adhikāram*. Of its nine sections five deal with *aham*, one with *puram*, one each with similes, prosody and idioms. The Tamilian convention of classifying physiographical regions as the four – *kurinji*, *mullai*, *marutam* and *neidal*, and specifying the people who live there, their general pursuits, the seasons and the daily hours which are special to each region, the emotion of love that is most applicable to each region, the natural setting, animals and birds and the tutelary deities – starts from *Tolkāppiyam* The author does not consider *pālai* – the desert region – as the fifth region, its classification as the fifth has been adopted much later Though Tolkāppiyar held the regions as only four, he held the conventional conduct in love poetry, *tinai*, to be five Along with these five - *aintiṇai*, he added two more, one-sided love (*kaikkilai*) and improper love (*perum tinai*) This classification has been adopted by later writers and no one has bettered it The regions and the conventional conduct in the love theme is symbolized by five flowers- *kurinji* the hills, *mullai* the forest, *marutam* the plains, *neidal* the sea coast and *pālai* the desert The themes associated with these are *kurinji* – union of the lovers, *mullai* – separation, *marutam* – patient waiting under separation, *neidal* – waiting on account of separation, and *pālai* – the woes of separation. *Tolkāppiyam* gives the themes and their elaboration only as isolated or stray topics, while later grammars like *Nambi ahapporul* and the *kōvai* poems string them together into a continuous narrative

Just as *aham* also means a house and a domestic life, its external counterpart *puram* means mostly war in the ancient past. The activities connected with war are

also grouped into seven categories or *tinai* War generally commences with the agressor marching into the enemy's country and capturing his herds of cattle. There were in war certain ethical codes, which laid down that the cows and some similiar objects are not to be hurt, and so this preventive action Flowers are always associated with the war activities Eight flowers are mentioned The raiding forces which capture the herds wear the *vetci (ixora)* flowers as a symbol of their raid, and so on [3] Corresponding to the laurel which is a symbol of victory, the eighth activity we have here the *vāhai (albizzia)*

Among the other chapters of the book, that on prosody is important It had evolved into a separate and full division of Tamil grammar and many books have been written on the subject Some of them at least are extant today The term used to denote poetry was *seyyul* and according to the author it means not only verse, but many other types of composition besides However such types do not have any wide currency The elegance of poetic composition, *vanappu*, is said to be eight by Tolkāppiyar [1] Later critics had tried to equate all later literary production with one or the other of these But these again had no currency, and what the author meant is obscure.

The chapter on *marapu* is important It records many literary conventions for posterity Many of them have passed out of use, but yet it has helped in the evolution of the later *nighantu* (lexicon) writing.

A grammarian is normally concerned only with the letters, and syntax. It is indeed unique that

Tolkāppiyar has taken up the study of the subject matter of poetry also in his grammatical treatise We do not have any treatise earlier than his But since he himself always says ‘it is said’, ‘they say so’, ‘scholars say so’, it is evident that there were earlier treatises which dealt with grammar in this manner Hence we should take it that the tradition in Tamil is to consider the subject matter also, in a book on grammar

It is not easy to recapture all the thoughts recorded in an analytical treatise of a thousand years ago, when the continuity is broken or forgotten. But the first commentator Ilampūranar has done this for *Tolkāppiyam*, by his commentary written a thousand years after the original His commentary on the three books is fully available It was the basis for Naccinārkkiniyar who has also commented on the whole book In between the two, many writers wrote glosses on the second book, the gloss by Sēnāvaraiyar is considered to be a masterpiece Only a fragment of of Pērāsiriyar’s commentary on *porul* is available These writers open out for us magic fields as it were of enchanting life and thought, and language and literature, the richness and variety of which the Tamils could not have even dreamed of but for them The richness of *Tolkāppiyam* far excels these

References

1 *Tolkappiyam, Solladhikaram,* chapter 9 5

2 *Ibid* 9 4

3 Cf The practice of the contesting teams in a modern games tournament wearing different coloured uniforms, the flowers stood in the place of these uniforms

4 *Ibid. Poruladhikaram* 8 227-234.

TAMIL RHETORIC

In any well developed language, rhetoric, or the branch of grammar dealing with ornamentation of expression in speech and writing, is also a well developed branch In Sanskrit and in Tamil, this has taken the form of a separate science or *Śāstra*, called *alankāra* (in Sanskrit) and simply *ani* in Tamil Every one, from the humblest to the highest, uses figures in his speech and this is the subject of *ani* The term is not known to Tolkāppiyar but he does deal with the figure *uvamai* (similes) in detail When at a later stage Tamil was considered to have the five branches of analytical grammar, *ani* was placed as the fifth branch *Vīrasōliyam* (11th century) is the only early treatise which deals with the five parts in detail, but we find there has been a treatise on *ani* by name the *Aniyal*,[1] by the 8th century The book is not extant today, but a few citations therefrom are available These seem to indicate that the work was purely of Tamil origin *Vīrasōliyam* confesses[2] that it borrows everything from the Sanskrit *Kāvyādarśam* of Dandi.

A later writer, given the same name Dandi, after the Sanskrit writer, has composed the Tamil *Dandi Alankāram*, which is the most widely used text on the subject today Figures of speech here are principally of two categories · one which goes by the sense and the other which goes by the sound alone. All figures

like the simile, metaphor etc , come under the first and it is the one which gives beauty to expression and meaning Pun and such like figures which create an effect only through sound are of a lower order of figures, if we may say so, and they are not generally found in the older classical poems. They are mere gymnastics in words and sound, indulged in by later versifiers who are barren of poetic imagination and artistic thought Dandi deals with both The second category had come to hold the field, when petty poets sought the patronage of small local chieftains, on the disappearance of the three royal princes in Tamilnad and of their patronage

Māran Alankāram, an original work and *Kuvalayānandam*, adaptation from a Sanskrit source, are two important manuals on the subject written in the 16th and the 19th centuries, but they had never any great popularity *Māran Alankāram* is a very ambitious work, written by a gifted author who had himself written all the examples for his figures Usually in Dandi and all the other grammatical treatises, the commentaries and their citations are even more valuable than the treatises themselves

Notes and References

1 Vide the note on *Ani iyal,* page 551 and 623 in my History of Tamil Literature 12th century (Tamil)

2 *Virasoliyam,* Bhavanandar Academy edition 1942, verses 143, 149, 160.

THE LEXICONS

NIGHANTU

There are many lexicographical books called *Nighantu*, in the Tamil language, dating from the ninth century Some word meanings were indicated in *Tolkāppiyam*, in the *Uri iyal* (qualifying words), *Itai iyal* (particles) and *Marapiyal* (literary usage) sections The words listed and explained are only 120 The first full-fledged lexicon is *Divākaram* of Divākarar It consists of twelve sections, the first ten dealing with different class vocabularies, the eleventh dealing with homonyms and the twelfth dealing with group names. What we generally call a dictionary is the subject matter of section eleven The first ten sections conform to the treatment contained in a modern thesaurus The subject matter of the first ten sections is - celestial beings and bodies, human beings and the organs of the body, animals etc, plants, places, natural objects, tools etc, qualities, actions, sounds and words This general arrangement of subject matter seems to have been conveniently adopted by all the later lexicographers.

Pingalantai is the second *nighaṇtu* It is more elaborate and it also deviates from the subject arrangement of *Divākaram* The number of words dealt with in this is about 15,000 as against 10,000 in *Divākaram*.

The next important *nighantu* is *Cūdāmani nighantu* of Mandala puruda He follows *Divākaram* in his arrangement of the subject matter but has written his work in the *viruttam* metre as against the *ahaval* or blank verse of the other *Viruttam* lent itself to a little singing and so was easy of memorising. We have seen all pupils in the village schools, even up to the end of the first quarter of the present century, memorising this *nighantu* or at least the eleventh section thereof, which had come to be known as the Eleventh *Nighantu* This was an advance on all the earlier *nighantu* works, and a *nighantu* meant only this book All other books numbering more than a score have only a historical value

Next to *Cūdāmani nighantu*, two other books deserve mention here One is *Aharādi nighantu*, by Rēvana siddha, here the author has dropped the subject classification and adopted a new arrangement, where the words defined occur as the first words in each *nūrpā* (verse), in the alphabetical order He coined the term *aharādi* to denote this arrangement of an alphabetical order and the term has stuck The modern *aharādi*, the name for a dictionary, is an application of this term Another book is *Porul tohai nighantu* of a much later period, which deals only with group names

DICTIONARY

From these, we pass on to the complete modern dictionary The first such book was the one compiled by Supradīpa kavirāyar for Beschi It contained four sections and was called *Catur aharādi* This did away with the ancient arrangement of the subject

matter and listed all the words into one series arranged in the strictly alphabetical order The first part is the ordinary modern dictionary, the second dealt with synonyms, the third with group names, and the fourth was a dictionary of rhymes When we have passed on to the age of science and technology, the latter three sections which were intended to help the versifier fell into disuse, and only the first section has continued in importance as a regular dictionary

The most outstanding dictionary in modern times is of course the Tamil Lexicon, prepared under the auspices of the Madras University and completed with a supplement in 1939 It gives meanings as usual with all grammatical features, and illustrative quotations The meanings are arrange dgenerally in a chronological sequence, where research of the period permitted this Since the lexicon work was started with an Englishman at the head, it gives not only English meanings, but also an English transliteration It is a great work of which any language and any nation can he proud All credit to its learned and selfless editor Vaiyapuri Pillai

Notes

Apart from the edition of Tandavaraya Mudaliyar in 1835, *Divakaram* is yet to see a scholar's edition The first edition of *Pingalam* was by Sivan Pillai in 1890 and it was done well But mistakes therein caused by the transposition of the leaves in the manuscript are yet to be corrected *Cudamani* has been issued by the Navalar press at Cidambaram in several editions *Aharadi nighantu* and *Porul tohai nighantu* had been edited well and issued by the Madurai Tamil Sangham in 1921 and 1920. For an exhaustive treatment of the nighantu, vide my History of Tamil Literature 10th century (Tamil) pages 204–5,

TAMIL ISAI

We have spoken in an earlier section about Tamil *Isai* as the second division of mut-Tamil All the earlier commentators like the author of *Kalaviyal urai* and Adiyārkku nallār give elaborate references to *Isai* Tamil works and grammatical treatises on the subject The metre *paripādal*, perhaps a very ancient one mentioned in *Tolkāppiyam*, was said to be suited to music A fragment of the sangam anthology of the same name, *Paripādal*, (22 songs out of the traditional 70) is available and it gives the names of 13 composers, and 10 musicians who wrote the notations therefor The songs[1] are composed on Muruga, Tirumāl (Visnu), the river Vaigai and the city of Madurai However, the metre and the type of poem is totally absent in the whole range of Tamil literature from that period to the modern day (excepting perhaps an attempt by the author of *Pā-pāvinam*[2], 16th century, who wrote five *paripādal* verses merely for illustration purposes) *Silappadhikāram* gives us a glimpse into the musical literature and also the grammar of music of the period in its chapters like the *Kānalvari*, but the whole body of that literature and grammar have been lost Adiyārkku nallār, the commentator of *Silappadhikāram*, cites many musical works and says that almost all of them had been lost before him He says that *Isai nunukkam*, written by Śikhaṇḍi a disciple of Agastya in order to teach music

to Sārakumāra, and *Indrakāliyam* had been his sources for the division of *Isai*.[3] These two, along with many other books, had since been lost. Hence the tradition of the ancient Tamilian music seems to have had only an interrupted history.

The reason for the disappearance of many books on music and drama is the suppression, during the Kalabhra interregnum, of Tamil classics on music and drama, and on *ahapporul* (love poetry), as tending to stimulate the lower passions of man and lead him away from a life of righteousness.

However, music had a marvellous revival in the 7th century onwards through the singing of Tiru Jñāna Sambandha. No doubt all the Śaiva canon and the Vaisnava canon from the 7th to the 9th centuries had been set to music. But it was Sambandha who carried on an active campaign for music. He always called himself Jñāna Sambandha, learned in *isai* Tamil.[4] No other ācārya campaigned for *isai* as much as he did. His struggle with the Jains was on two fronts, one religion and two music. He had sung many varieties of *pan* (musical tunes), and he was also familiar with musical instruments. His influence caught on and from him started the singing of *devāram* in the temples during specific hours and occasions. The Chola emperors who ruled from the 9th century patronised *devaram* music and gave magnificient grants to temples and singers to encourage this singing.

The *pāna* community seems to have been the custodians of music and drama in early Tamilnad. But the vicissitudes of fortune of the ruling classes

during the Kalabhra period seem to have also wiped out the *pāna* class, for lack of patronage When Nambiyāndarnambi recovered *devāram* with the help of Rājarāja Chōla, persons who knew the music were rare so he had to go to distant Erukkattam-puliyūr to find a musician to set the tune for the *devāram* hymns This was the place of Tiru Nīlakantha yālppāna who accompanied Jñāna Sambandha on the *yāl* Nambi's hopes at finding a musician there were fulfilled, a young *pāna* girl who knew music was found there, she was brought to Lord Natarāja's temple in Cidambaram and she set the tunes to the hymns [5] Thereafter, they were sung in those tunes in all the temples

Tamil *isai*, in spite of its chequered career, continued as popular music through the temples and the temple orchestra, and to this day it has been existing only in this form *Devāram* music was played on the Tamilian instrument called *nādasvaram*, which has perpetuated it through the centuries with an unbroken continuity The fortunes of monarchies changed and, in spite of various religious and political onslaughts by alien powers, the *nādasvaram* instrument had kept alive the soul of Tamil *isai*

In the days of the Chōla supremacy, we learn that Kulōttunga Chōla I was a great musical composer and that his queen used to sing his compositions

Arunagiri nāthar in the 15th century gave a great impetus to the singing of music through his *Tiruppuhal* songs which are nothing if they are not rhythmic melodious music Millions sang them in all their social and temple gatherings, and continue to sing so in musical concerts even today

Under the Nāyak and the Mahratta rulers in Tamilnad, Tamil musical composition enters a new phase What is now called the *kīrttanam* was envolved in course of time The modern *bhajana* was fully influenced by the Mahrattas and was an evolution from the group singing of the Tamils, which had been in vogue through the singing of the *Devāram* and the *Tiruppuhal* songs Perhaps the first *kīrttanam* in in the Tamil language was written by a minor poet who sang a *kīrttanam* song in 1654 A D [7] to celebrate the event of the installation of the image of Tiruccendūr Muruga which was thrown into the sea by the Dutch, but reclaimed by Vadamalaiyappa pillai, the administrator of Tirunelvēli under Tirumalai Nāyak.

The next century witnessed the evolution of the three first composers of Tamil *kīrttanam*, namely Muttu Tāndavar, Arunācala kavi and Mārimuttā pillai

Muttu Tāndavar of Cidambaram was of a pious and saintly temperament Coming of the piper community, music and devotion to Lord Natarāja was in his blood and he went on singing *kīrttanams* and *padams* A *padam* is an erotic poem depicting in *kīrttanam* form the pining of a love-sick damsel for the love of God. His songs became immediately popular and are the great attraction in the musical concerts even in the twentieth century They transport one to unknown realms of spiritual yearning and peace and breath into the audience an atmosphere of solace and comfort, in spite of their being in a love-song form. Most of them are also adapted for dance

Arunācala kavi of Śikāḻi wrote the Ramayana in *kīrttana* form ; it is a long serious opera, if we may

use the term It also became immediately popular and thousands of religious discourses on the *Rāmāyana* to the accompaniment of his musical pieces have been held in Tamilnad, keeping the audience spell-bound, both by the thought content and by the drama and music of the songs

Mārimuttā pillai of a village near Śikāli had also written a few *padams* which had captured the imagination of the Tamil people even in the third and the fourth decades of this century by their supplication to Lord Natarāja, as in Muttu Tāndavar All the three were contemporaries and lived about the middle of the 18th century Arunācala kavi and Mārimuttā pillai had also written many other literary works.

The element of music had been incorporated into many semi-dramatic pieces like the *kurāvanji* from the beginning of the 18th century There have been many writers in the 19th century who had written scores of dramatic musical pieces on the model of the *Rāmanātaka* of Arunācala kavi Gōpālakrisna Bhārati is the greatest of them all He lived in the middle of the last century and by his *Nandanār kīrttana*, he even excelled Arunācala kavi, both in emotional content and musical appeal His songs could move a heart of stone even today and, for the period of more than a century and over, they have helped to direct even the uneducated masses along the pathway to God

The famous Telugu composer Tyāgarāja lived during the period between the days of Arunācala kavi and of Gōpālakrisna Bhārati He lived in Tiruvaiyāru on the banks of the Kāvēri. His mother tongue was

Telugu He was of an intensely devotional temperament He wrote numerous *kīrttanāms* on the tunes and model of the Tamil music which he saw around him, sung of course in the local language When he sang, he no doubt used *his* mother tongue Telugu He was a great *bhākta* and a gifted composer and so his songs had become immensely popular from about the end of the 19th century and continue to be so to this day. Swāmi Rāmalinga[8] and many other less gifted persons had composed innumerable *kīrttanams* during the last century Vēdanāyakam pillai wrote his *Sarva samaya samarasa kīrttanai* towards the end of the last century. But he was not a musician and his songs, though they had thought content, were weighed down with artificial alliteration and rhyme so heavily that no musician ever sang any of his songs anywhere But Tyāgarāja's songs had attained such popularity that musicians sang only his compositions to the exclusion of all Tamil songs With the political awakening throughout the nation, a reaction to Tyāgarāja also set in in the musical field and there was a legitimate clamour for Tamil songs, songs which the Tamil people could follow, not only for their music but also for their thought content Many new books of Tamil *kīrttanams* of varying value came to be written recently by different authors who had more Tamilian fervour than musical perception, artistic equipment or emotional urge Few indeed are the modern compositions which can stand the test of time.

References

1 *Paripadal* edited by Dr. Swaminatha Ayyar 1935.

2. *Pa-pavinam*, Madurai Tamil Sangham 1932, pages 72–88.

3 *Silappadhikaram*, Dr. Swaminatha Ayyar 1927, page 10

4 Sambandhar *devaram* verses 44, 54, 348, 425, 700, 1090, 3459 etc

5 Umapathi Sivacarya, *Tirumurai kanda puranam*, 32–34 *et seq*

6 *Kalingattupparani* verse 286, S Rajam's edition, 1960

7 *Kirttanam* by Venrimalai Kavirayar, in Vadamalai *venba* page 31

8 The works of Ramalinga swami, Kirttanaip-pahuti, A Balakrishna Pillai's edition 1933

DANCE AND DRAMA

DANCE

In the chapter on Mut-Tamil, we had indicated how dance and drama was considered as the third division of Tamil Literary production Agastya, the first grammarian, is said to have written a treatise on this branch also, but along with the other parts, this part is also not available, the three parts seem to have been lost even at the time of the first commentary writers The only work which gives us any glimpse of the conception of the drama in Tamil of the period two thousand years ago is *Silappadhikāram*, its two commentaries, coming probably 800 – 900 years after the book itself, seem to have had just a peep into the very wide range of the literature on music and dance of the *Silappadhikāram* period and nothing more, because almost all the texts had ceased to exist by then Madurai was the seat of the Pāndiyas who nourished the poetry of the period and extended their patronage to the Tamil poets around the beginning of the Christian era But the Pāndiya kingdom had been overrun by a band of alien marauders, called Kalabhras in the third century A. D and as these were of a religious persuasion which was alien to the one in the land, and as they practised an extreme austerity in in the matter of not only religion but also of art and all life, they suppressed all vestiges of Tamil art and letters. We have explained elsewhere how the

valuable contribution of *Tolkāppiyam*, namely *ahapporul*, was suppressed As music and dance were the opposites of religious austerities as understood by them, these had been ruthlessly suppressed The Kalabhras held sway over Madurai for about three hundred years and had wiped out many aspects of Tamil letters That is the reason why we do not have a single ancient classical treatise on music and dance, although *Silappadhikāram* commentators mention scores of such works and say that they had been lost.

We learn from *Silappadhikāram* that Adiyārkku nallār based his writing on *Isai nunukkam* and *Indra-kāliyam* for musical subjects, and the *Pancamarapu*, *Bharata sēnāpatīyam* and *Mativānar nātakat-Tamil nūl*[1] for the subjects of dance and drama Details had been elaborated for the dancer, the dance instructor, the music master, the composer, the drummer, the flutist, the *yāl* player, the stage, the inauguration and the dance [2] About a hundred types of *kūttu* or dance have been casually mentioned by the commentator [3]

The concept of dance had taken root in Tamil literature and had had a great elaboration, probably from the concept of Lord Natarāja as the Cosmic Dancer The concept of Natarāja is purely Tamilian and this has passed on from religion and legend to literature also Natarāja is said to have performed seven types of dances Other classical dances performed by various deities are the eleven, from *alliyam to kodukotti* [4] All these details had been taken up in literature and we find in *Silappadhikāram* mention of the dances and a large variety of types of *kūttu*, *abhinaya* or pose pictured by the hand and the fingers,

and presentation of emotions and sentiments through silent postures of the organs of the body including the hands and the fingers All these had been evolved as an independent and extensive science of dance through the Tamil language, perhaps by the centuries before the Christian era and, as already noted, we are permitted only a peep into that rich heritage and nothing more Remnants of that dance had been revived and given a new lease of life under the Imperial Cholas from the 9th to the 13th centuries, by the institution of the temple pipers and temple dancers What was left of those dances, after the Muslim onslaughts of the 14th century and later, has been handed down to us by the pipers who were the temple musicians and the temple dancers in the form of the *bharata-nātya* and *abhinaya* which we have today There was a *Bharata śāstra* in Tamil according to Adiyārkku nallār [5] The *Bharata śāstra* and similar Sanskrit works, which are spoken of today, are but natural evolutions from the very ancient Tamil dance and dance literature

Manuals of grammar and literature tell us that there were different troupes of dancers such as the *pānar*, *viraliyar*, *kūttar* and *porunar*[6] in the sangham age and the period immediately following, they specialised in music and dance and drama They flourished under the patronage of kings and local chieftains But when social life underwent a change during the Kalabhra rule, then, during the days of the Nāyanmārs and the Ālvārs, and lastly under the Chōla administration, the order of the *pānas* gradually disappeared and with them that ancient dance and drama of Tamil literature.

Dance had however a religious revival under the Chōla emperors as an adjunct of temple worship and in that form, it has continued to this day

DRAMA

Now we shall pass on to drama. Although we can fill volumes with material on dance, we do not have much material from the past on the drama, as we know it today The dramatic element is present in a wonderful measure in the great epics like *Kamba Rāmāyanam*, devotional poetry like *Tiruvācakam* and minor poems like *Nandik-kalambakam*, but the drama with definitely marked acts and scenes and the entry and exit of characters, as we see in the English Shakespearean plays, is not found in the Tamil literature However, we learn through inscriptions that dramas were really enacted in the temples on the occasion of the annual temple festivals at Tanjavūr and other places during the days of the Chōḷa supremacy. *Rājarāja vijayam* and *Rājarājēśvara nātakam*[7] were enacted in the Tanjavūr temple, these presumably were dramatic portrayals of the victories and glory of Rājarāja I Rājēndra II had endowed valuable gifts of rice for enacting those dramas. There was also a *Pūmpuliyur nātakam*,[8] enacted during the temple festivals of Tirup-pādiripuliyūr in the days of Kulōttunga I These stray examples only tell us that there had been popular dramas in those days enacted for the entertainment of vast gatherings of people on festival occasions But unfortunately, we do not have any single specimen of such plays.

Many centuries pass before we see again anything like the vestiges of drama in literature. The 17th

century and the later years have combined orthodox literature with folklore and have produced a kind of operas depicting the many facets of rustic life. Three types gain popularity by the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries The first of these is the *kuravanji*, the damsel of the *kurava* clan The *kuravanji* appears on the scene, reads the hand of a lovesick maiden, informs her that the Lord of her love, mostly the deity of the local temple, will reciprocate her love, gets many presents from her and departs with her own husband, who finds her here after a considerable search Poetic imagery, the jingle of words and sounds, the rustic setting, the temple procession and the love theme, and above all simple popular music, all together weave a pattern of magic romance about the whole story that it is excellent reading, as well as supremely arresting acting. *Kurrālak-kuravanji* is the first and easily the best *kuravanji* of the kind Later poems of the type had come to be written in praise of petty chiefs also The *Kūluva nātakam*, is a shorter version depicting only one scene from the *kuravanji*, where the *kurava* and his companion the *kuluva* set out in search of the missing *kuravanji*

The *Pallu nātakam* came into prominence by about the same time While the *kuravanji* dealt with the hill life, the *pallu* dealt with the pastoral life The theme is still more simple here A *palla* labourer is a farm servant in a temple farm The natural jealousy between his two wives causes the *palla* himself to be placed in fetters The farm work is paralysed. They then come to their senses and cause the *paḷḷa* to be released and to complete the farm work.

This is principally a dance drama, and fully a folk-play of the masses, much more than the *kuravanji*. The pomp and glitter of that is absent here

The *Nondi nātakam*, also of about the same period, is a sort of monologue, where a lame man (nondi), the hero of the play, appears on the stage and enacts his own story He is a wastrel whose escapades of amour and villainy have caused him loss of the leg and left him lame. The amorous stories in the narration were perhaps intended to appeal to the sensuous character of the petty chieftains of the 18th century to capture whose attention they were written.

With feelings of relief, we now turn to the devotional writers, the trio of the mid-18th century, Muttu Tāndavar, Mārimuttā pillai and Arunācala kavi. The last has written, besides many *purāṇas* and *prabandhas*, the *Rāma nātaka kīrttana* which is an opera based on *Kamba Rāmāyanam* It is quite a long work and has been famous ever since it was written Till the appearance of the cinema, it had thrilled hundreds of audiences, throughout the length and breadth of the country The unlettered masses were greatly attracted to it, both by the element of devotion and by the element of music

The outstanding merit of *Rāma nātakam* is said to be the delicate choice of the *rāgas* (musical modes) which are in perfect unison with the sentiments expressed by the several songs The *Rāmāyanam*, both in Sanskrit and in Tamil, is followed by the *Uttara kānda*, here also, Ananta Bhārati wrote a large opera on the *Uttara kānda* on the model of *Rāma nātakam*

A century latter, Gōpālakrisna Bhārati wrote his song - drama on the life of Saint Nandanār. The element of devotion and the music here are far superior, the songs of his opera have passed into the folklore of the Tamils and the work is immensely popular even today, when society is in the powerful clutches of the octopus called the cinema

As a drama-cum-musical composition, it is a masterpiece Bhārati elaborated the short account of Sēkkilār, supplying flesh and blood to the story, creating characters and situations Devotion is the one keynote of the work and through this he displays all his powers of dramatisation, imagination and characterisation Himself a great musician, he had made this a supremely musical tribute to Natarāja through Nandanār, the drama is all the greater, because the high caste Brahmin is putting the devotion of the low caste Nanda into a musical drama Bhārati had written a few other devotional operas, not so well known

Many large works such as *Bhāratam, Bhāgavatam, Periya purāṇam, Kanda purānam,* and *Tiruvilaiyādal purānam,* had been rendered into such musical dramas at about the same period. However, this kind of composition completely stopped from the beginning of the 20th century.

The popularity of *Rāma nātakam,* and later *Nandanār nātakam,* had made many writers try their hand at this kind of opera-making. Episodes from the Mahā-bhārata have easily lent themselves to this kind of writing and acting Scores of such drmaas were written in the 19th century and performed to

packed houses; but their popularity had been only short-lived An exception may be made in the case of the story of Hariścandra, the king who sacrified everything, his wife and son and himself also, for the cause of Truth, it was popular even down to the middle of the 20th century All these operas were known by the name *Vilāsam*

The impact of western education had introduced Shakespearean literature to the English educated class Some of the enlightened tried their hand at the writing of the literary drama on the Shakespearean model, principally for reading The most famous of such dramas is *Manōnmanīyam* by Professor Sundaram pillai, which has become a classic within half a century, in its own right The plot was taken by him from an English story, but he has woven Tamilian flesh and blood into it to make it a realistic mediaeval Tamil drama As in the English dramas he has adopted the blank verse for the drama *Ravi varmā* by the musical composer Laksmana pillai and several dramas and operas by other writers followed, but they failed to achieve any distinction

Pammal Sambandha mudaliyar was a great play-wright of the 20th century He was a member of the judiciary in Madras but he took to acting and organising amateur performances as a hobby He lifted up the 20th century drama from the lowly condition of the open air street plays to the level of the cultured and educated classes and conferred dignity on the acting He wrote about a hundred plays, all of which were acted, himself participating in most He did the greatest service to the drama, the like of

which had not been done or attempted anywhere But yet, his plays fall short of being called literary works The greatest popularisers of the good drama by the middle of the 20th century are the T K S brothers whose *Avvai* is deservedly famous

No good literary work can be produced in the field of the Tamil drama for sometime. The trend of the times is such that depth and vision seem to be almost a taboo in such writing The radio is also responsible for broadcasting vulgarity and coarseness and for making a virtue of it so much, that for some time no dramatic work can emerge as a work of art, or as a literary piece The glamour of the vulgar cinema is such that the dramatic writer cannot raise his head against the lure of the sexy cinema for a long time to come.

References

1 *Silappadhikaram,* edited by Dr Swaminatha Ayyar page 10 2 *Ibid* pages 78-12 3 *Ibid* page 88, 4 *Ibid* page 89 5 *Ibid* page 9

6 *Tolkappiyam, Poruladhikaram* 91

7. S I I, Volume II No 67

8. S I I, Volume VII Nos 752-3

POETRY OF THE SANGHAM PERIOD.

I ETTUT-TOHAI

We had stated in a previous section that by the beginning of the Christian era, the Third Sangham had flourished at the site of the present city of Madurai and had produced quite a large volume of poetry Although some portions of that poetry are said to have been irretrievably lost, we yet have quite a large volume available now These are grouped under two major heads – *Ettut-tohai* and *Pattup-pāttu* Till recently, such groups as the *18 Kilk-kanakku* and the five so-called major epics were vaguely called sangham poetry, these are no longer called so and we here confine our discussion to the first two groups only

Though we have mentioned the major heads here as two, following the literary history and convention, it may not be wrong to say that they are really one of *nine* anthologies, *Pattup-pāttu* itself being in fact an anthology of long poems, while the first eight are anthologies of short lyrics [1]

ETTU-TOHAI

As the name indicates, here we have eight anthologies (tohai - collection) Of the eight, six may belong to the earlier period of the sangham age, while

two others may belong to the end of the period It is probable that when these verses and groups of verses were collected together, a sort of classification was made and the anthologies numbered as eight A later day verse however gives the eight anthologies in the following order · *Narrinai*, *Kuruntohai*, *Ainkuru nūru*, *Padirruppattu*, *Paripādal*, *Kalittohai*, *Aha nānūru* and *Pura nānūru* But this has nothing to do with their subject matter or with the process of their compilation

The following might have been the process of compilation *Paripādal* contains only musical pieces and so it formed a separate book *Kalittohai*, comprising of verses only in the kalippā metre, forms another separate book 500 short verses, in groups of 100 each on the five regions, having *aham* as their subject matter, constitute a separate book called *Ainkuru nūru* Ten groups of ten verses each in praise of ten Sēra kings form a separate book, by name *Padirrup-pattu*. About 1600 separate verses were now left Of these 400 stray verses with *puram* as their subject constitute another book, *Pura nānūru* Lastly, we have about 1200 verses having as their subject *aham* The number was perhaps thought to be very large and so it was split up into three books, based on the length of each verse – verses with lines 5 – 8 constituted *Kurun-tohai*, or the compilation of the shortest verses, the next group contained lines 9 – 12 and was called *Narrinai*, the last group containing poems which were left over had lines 13 – 31 and was called *Nedun-tohai*, longer verses or *Aha nānūru* This surmise is possible because we find most of the poets singing songs which are found in several of the anthologies Except *Kalittohai* and *Paripāḍal*, all the others are in the *asiriyam* metre,

Another noteworthy feature is that the compiler, the patron and the number of poets are mentioned in respect of the five *aham* anthologies, but not in respect of the three *puram* collections *Padirrup-pattu*, *Paripādal* and *Pura nānūru*[2] Perundēvanār who had written the Bhāratam is said to have prefixed an invocatory verse, to the *aham* collections except the *Kalittohai*, and to *Pura nānūru*

Ettut-tohai (particularly the five books on *aham*) is essentially a collection and grouping of verses which are isolated and independent of one another None of them is a narrative poem But yet, each little verse enacts a scene in a drama, to understand the scene and the poem, the reader has to know the speaker, the person spoken to, and the context Naturally this dramatic setting has given rise to many conventions The *Poruladhikāram* of Tolkāppiyar is a codification of these conventions.

We shall now examine the eight books[3] in detail, taking up the *aham* group first

THE FIRST THREE

The three anthologies, *Kuruntohai*, *Narrinai and Aha nānūru* are all love poems, sung by various authors There are not only bards, but princes, women and brahmins also among the poets. The verses are all occasional verses, not set to any pattern Almost all of them come from the mouth of some character, a hero, a heroine, his or her comrade, mother or a bystander Hence the element of drama is always present The poet never refers to himself but makes the character speak and act A passing thought and a fleeting

emotion are very vividly expressed in each verse, be it short or long Similes and some elementary figures are never lacking, these only help the thought embedded in the character's words and give it greater force and vigour Their very simplicity is the great hall-mark of their high poetry. The poet indents upon all nature to aid the emotional experience he is trying to to put into words Reading the few lines of the verses the reader will pause at every line, thoughts flit across his mind, and conjure up visions of nature, of life, which though simple in themselves, yet are poignant with subtle strains of feeling and experience. All the verses in all the three books will easily lend themselves to this understanding Verses relating to the five *tinai* are found in each anthology

Apart from the size of the poems, there is not much difference in the poetic or lyrical content of the verses in each collection The longer verses have greater imagery and drama, while the shorter ones are more crisp and sweeter, and more elegant

KURUN-TOHAI

This collection consists of the shortest separate poems There are 205 poets represented here. The collection was made by one Pūrikkō The name of the patron-king is not given The number of verses is 401 They are not arranged in any order Some of the sweetest and simple love poems are in this collection

NARRINAI (NAL-TINAI)

This collection was made under the patronage of the Paṇḍiya king, Pannāḍu tanda māṛan vaḻudi, this

king has also sung two verses in this collection and one in *Kuruntohai* There are here 175 poets. The name of the compiler is not given. One verse in the book is missing

AHA NANURU

This collection has 400 verses It is said to have been collected together by Rudra sarma, son of Madurai Uppūrikudi kilān, under the patronage of Pandiyan Ugrap-peruvaludi Many legends had been woven around these two names It will suffice if we say that they are also mentioned in the commentary on *Iraiyanār kalaviyal* The patron is said to have sung a verse each in *Aha nānūru* and *Narrinai* The number of poets here is given as 145 This compilation, unlike the others, has a curious arrangement of verses Of the 400 numbers, all odd numbers are on the *pālai tinai*, i e , 200 verses in effect All tens on *neidal*; those having 4, 14, 24 etc belong to *mullai*, 2 and 8 to *kurinji*, and 6 to *marutam*[4] Since *Aha nānūru* verses are the longest (upto 31 lines) the compiler perhaps made this artificial arrangement, this may also indicate that this compilation was arranged later than the other two We see here that the poets sang most on the *pālai tinai*

AINKURU NURU

Ainkuru nūru (the five short hundreds) is also in the *āsiriyam* metre and contains the contribution of five poets on the five *tinais* All the verses are here very short, between 3 and 6 lines Each hundred (sung by one poet) is divided into ten tens and each ten contains ten verses on the same theme Often the opening pharses, and sometimes the first line itself, are repeated

in each of the ten verses This arrangement may tend to give a feeling of monotony But in fact it is not so As the verses are very short, the author has to plunge directly into his subject, without any padding or description In some tens,[5] each verse consists of only three lines, the first lines are repeated in full in all the ten, the author is left with only two lines for giving out his thoughts, but yet, he is able to paint a picture charged with emotion and subtle suggestion The tens are named after animals and common objects, such as the elephant, the crab, the buffalo, the crane, the parrot, the peacock, the crow and the bangle, abstract thoughts like yearning, the city of Tondi, and the utterances of the characters Perhaps we may notice here a touch of folk-lore in the choice of the titles The arrangement of groups of verses into ten each found here and in *Padirrup-pattu* had come to stay *Kural* itself is composed of ten verses to each section In later literary history, we find the entire Śaiva and Vaisnava canon to be composed of tens *(padikams)* *Ainkuru nūru* may be taken to be the fore-runner of the refrain arrangement found in such *padikam* writing

The collection was made by Kūdalūr kilār, under the patronage of the elephant-eyed Sēra, Māntaram Sēral-Irumporai The compiler's songs (numbering four) are found in *Kuruntohai* and *Pura nānūru*

KALIT-TOHAI

Kalit-tohai on the other hand is not a short poem but quite a long one Many of the verses, because of the metre, lend themselves to involved construction, which appears to be in harmony with the involvement

in the subject If the verses of *Kurun-tohai* etc. are brilliant polished gems, those of *Kalit-tohai* are jewels, where many such gems are set to make a beautiful and dazzling design of colour and brilliance.

Each verse is an elaborate drama, an one act play, in which often more than one character act their parts. There is a beginning in the drama, a course of development and a fitting finale or climax, all within the space of a single verse The *kalippa* metre has different arrangements of feet, which can be long or short, and can also expand in parts according to the needs of the subject Its diction also is sweet and musical and these lend to it a quality supple, chaste and well polished, often graceful and refined, far superior to the ruggedness of the *asiriyam* which is akin to the English blank verse The change of moods, the play of emotions and the delineation of character are all very well expressed in the *kali* verses. This kind of elasticity has led critics to conclude that *Kalit-tohai* can be only a later composition, though of the sangham period, but this need not necessarily be so.

This collection was made by Nallanduvanār, who had also written its section on *neiḍal.*

PADIRRUP-PATTU

Next we come to the two *puram* poems *Padirrup-pattu* and *Pura nānūru.* The *puram* themes generally comprise all themes not contained in *aham* poetry They mostly deal with war and peace, giving and receiving, ethics and the larger truths bearing on life in general. *Padirrup-pattu*, as stated before, is ten

tens, each ten glorifying the valour and benevolence of a Sēra prince, this praise of the Sēra is a unique feature, such exclusive praise in a distinct group of verses had not been extended to the other princes The princes had rewarded the poets magnificently Another unique feature of these poems is that a happy expression had been chosen from each verse and given as its title. As poetry, this poem is even more rugged than *Pura nānūru* The poem mentions a settlement of Yavanar, perhaps the Ionian Greeks, and this helps scholars to fix the date of the poem, and lends further support to the age of the sangham The first and the last tens of the collection are missing.

PURA NANURU

Pura nānūru occupies a unique place not only in the sangham poetry, not only in the History of the Tamil Literature, but also in the history of the Tamil race and its culture It is not possible even to refer to its many contributions to the history of our culture in this short survey, but we shall merely refer to a few There is a brilliant galaxy of great writers, men and women, bards and kings, young and old, rich and poor, high and low, who have contributed poems to the work King Nedunceliyan sings of the importance of education Friendship means intensity of feeling and not frequent personal contact, the story of Kōpperum Chōḷa and Pisir Āndai is a monumental example A defeated prince dies of thirst, rather than get water as a captive from the warder who is in charge of his prison Many are the poems which portray the bravery and heroism of women as mothers and as wives. The queen of Bhūta Pāndiya rebukes

the elders who dissuade her from giving up her life on the death of her husband, and valiantly and dutifully dies in the flames which consume his body Another poet advises the ruler against indiscriminate taxation; the ruler should realise that the king, and not food and water, is the sustenance for the subjects The world goes by the services of self-sacrificing individuals who ceaselessly strive for the welfare of humanity.

'Any place is my place and the whole world is kin, the good and the bad do not accrue from another, death has always been there, living is neither sweet nor bitter, life goes on in the manner ordained, we neither bow to the great nor taunt the lowly' says one poet [6]

'All persons, be they princes or peasants, require only a measure of rice for food, and two bits of cloth to cover the body, other needs are equal, hence the best use of riches is giving, if we expect to enjoy everything, most will escape us' says another [7]

A Chōḷa prince says 'There are people like the little field mouse, which fills its hole with the mature grains in the fields There are yet others like the valiant tiger, which pursuing a wild boar for food, declines to eat it because it fell to its left, it goes without food that day, and the next day it fells a he-elephant on its right and eats it, let me have more days of companionship with men of such calibre'[8]

Says King Neduncheliyan 'If I do not carry out my word in crushing my foes, may poets cease to sing the praises of my kingdom ....'. This

asseveration indicates the great esteem in which the rulers held the poets and their composition in those days

These instances are sufficient to give a glimpse of the lofty ideals and noble culture of the Tamils two thousand years ago

157 poets and 128 kings and chiefs are represented in this collection.

PARIPADAL

Lastly we take up *Paripādal* It is a kind of musical verse whose very pattern and music have long been wholly lost We have now only 22 out of the original 70 verses in the book A colophon under each verse gives the name of the author, the musical mode and the name of the musician who wrote the notation The songs are in praise of Muruga, Tirumāl, the city of Madurai, and the river Vaigai That its thought content was of a very high quality, there is no doubt; a poet says, 'My Lord, I do not pray for wealth or gold, or for the pleasures of life, I pray Thee, grant me compassion, love and charity.'[10] A large number of love themes are also treated in *Paripādal* Enjoyment of life at its fullest can be found here, the songs on Vaigai speak of a rich and luxurious enjoyment of the river-side, in this sense it has no parallel in literature.

Isai or music is the second major division of Tamil, but *isai*-Tamil has been totally lost. The two commentaries on *Silappadhikāram* indicate to us the rich heritage of *isai* which had been there but was no longer available even in their days. *Paripāḍal* gives us

a fragmental picture of that *isai* - Tamil, without the music No one had ever attempted the *Paripādal* metre, before or after, except the few *paripādal* verses in *Pa - pāvinam* Nothing is known about the compiler or his patron

Notes and References

1 There is a grouping in later times of the eight anthologies and ten idylls together, making a total of 18 as the 18 *Melkanakku*, a parallel to the 18 *Kilkkanakku* This has no sanction in literary usage

2 *Sangha Ilakkiyam*, Samajam Edition 1940, pages 1371–73

3 Of the eight books considered here, *Kuruntohai*, *Aingurunuru*, *Padirruppattu*, *Purananuru* and *Paripadal* have been edited by Dr Swaminatha Ayyar, the first with his own bright and lucid commentary, and the others with ancient commentaries of the 12–13 centuries *Narrinai* was edited with an original and scholarly gloss by Pinnattur Narayanaswami Ayyar *Aha nanuru* has a short commentary for only part of it, edited by R Raghava Ayyangar *Kalittohai* with the brilliant commentary of Naccinarkkiniyar was edited by Anantarama Ayyar, and earlier by Damodaram Pillai Later editions are merely copies from these and are neither scholarly nor reliable

4 *Vide* the three verses commencing *viyamellam* on pages 1371–2 of *Sanga Ilakkiyam*, Samajam edition 1940

5 *Vide* verses (1–10, 31–40), 121–30, (151–60, 161–70), 341–50 and 431–40

6 *Purananuru* verse 192 7. *Ibid* 189. 8. 190 9. 72

10. *Paripadal* verse 6

THE POETRY OF THE SANGHAM PERIOD

II. PATTUP - PĀTTU

Pattup-pāttu or the Ten Idylls are ten long separate poems[1] in the *āsiriyam* metre, ranging from 103 to 782 lines Of the ten, six are on *puram* and and four are on *aham* , again of the six, five are of the *prabandha*, *arrup-padai* type Of the six, one is in praise of Lord Muruga, while four are in praise of kings, and the last in praise of a local chief Again, among the poets, Mudat-tāmakkanni is a woman who sang in praise of Karikāl Chōla. Two poems each have been sung by Nakkīrar and Rudram kannanār Two of the major poets of the period, Kapilar, and Nakkīrar have sung in this group The Chōlā King Karikāla and the Pāndiya King Neduncehyan are some of those eulogised here

We shall now proceed to examine each poem briefly, in the order in which it is found in *Pattup-pāttu* collection.

1. *Tiru Murugarruppadai* by Nakkīrar is probably placed first in the Pattup-pāttu as an invocatory poem for the collection of ten It is in praise of the traditional six camps of Lord Muruga. One who has enjoyed the grace of the Lord directs another to the Presence. He describes the six places vividly.

Description of nature, the manner of worship, the disciplined ways of His devotees, the life of the hill tribes and the conferment of His grace are all dealt with in graphic langugage While speaking of the second shrine, the author describes at length the six countenances and the twelve arms of Muruga The poem, though terse and difficult of comprehension, is repeated by rote today in thousands of Tamil homes as a devotional song, sometimes by semi-literates also. Muruga here is not any deity, but a manifestation of the Absolute.

2 *Porunar-ārruppadai* by the poetess, Mudattāmakkanni, directs the bard, who is a singer of battles, to go and get presents from King Karikāla The popular legend that Prince Karikala, though very young in years, assumed a garb of mature age in order to make two contesting parties have faith in his wisdom and judgement, is also referred to here A great tribute is paid to the Kāvēri, the battle of the king at Venni is celebrated here A tribute is also paid to the *pālaip-pan* (a musical mode) which is said to be capable of winning over even the wild robbers of the desert The poem is in the *āsiriyam* metre as is usual with all sangham poetry, but yet there are many lines in the *vanji* metre which is rare The other works which have a large number of the *vanji* lines are *Madurai-kānji* and *Pattinappālai*

3 *Siru-pān-arrupadai* is in praise of Nalliyakkōdan to whom the author Nattattanār directs a bard. *Pānar* are the bards who sing to the accompaniment of their instrument, the *yāl* The *yāl* is of two kinds the smaller one and the bigger one and the *pāṇas*

themselves are known after the instruments *siru-yal* and *pēriyāl*, which they practised, as the *sirupānar* and the *perumpānar*, we have here two *arrup-padais* relating to the two classes of *pānas* Of the two *pān* poems in this group, this is the shorter one The bard's wife is described in detail, the cities of Tamilnad are celebrated and the generosity of the patron is extolled. The poem refers to the seven *vallals* (patrons) of the sangham age and says that this patron has the virtues of all the seven put together

4 *Perum-pān-ārruppadai* Here Rudram kannanār directs a bard to Ilantiraiyan of Kānci The bard's instrument is described in detail, the hardships of travel, the people of the plains, the brahmin way of life, the coast, the city and the generosity of the patron are all given out in detail The picture of the region of the five *tinais*, the respective people and their hospitality[1], the hospitalities of the brahmins etc are done in a very interesting manner The description of Kāncipuram and its festivals gives us perhaps a picture of pre-Pallava days Visnu at Tiru-Vehhā in the city is referred to

5 *Mullaip-pāttu* is the shortest poem in this group The hero leaves his wife for the battle front. Elders console her to bear with separation bravely. The war is over and he returns happily home Many a description of the war front is given here, as well as the pangs of separation in the two, and also a description of the rainy season The poem is by Nappūtanār. *Mullai* is the forest region Omens, some elephant lore, and life in the encampments of the battle front are some of the chief features here.

6. *Maduraik-kānji* is the longest poem, sung by Māngudi Maruda, to instruct the Pāndiya King Neduncеliyan of the transcience of life The several battles of the Pāndiya, the prosperity of the city, its market place, the entertainments of the people, the festivities and similar things are described Kānji means the transcience of life. Some of the descriptions here serve as illustrations of the *puram* topics of *poruladhikāram* The poem has also a number of references to contemporary history

7 *Nedunalvādai* is by Nakkīrar Pāndiyan Neduncеliyan has gone to the battle front. There he goes a round of the battle field at dead of night, anxiously ministering to the wounded soldiers and animals The heroine worships Korravai and prays for his speedy return The description of the winter is remarkable This is a *neidal* poem ; one of despair under separation This is considered to be one of the best poetic pieces of the period

8 *Kurinjip-pāttu* is by Kapilar, intended to teach the Ārya prince Brhatta the beauties of Tamil (love poetry) *Kurinji* is the hill tract The poem speaks of clandestine love Here, while saying that the heroine gathered flowers and piled them on a piece of rock, the author enumerates one hundred flowers This is a glowing tribute to the author's observation of nature and his knowledge of the botanical science Muruga the Lord of *kurinji* is celebrated in a fitting manner. Perhaps Brhatta mastered Tamil love poetry so well that he was himself able to compose a poem on the subject [2]

9 *Pattinap pālai* · This is also by the poet Rudram kannanār, in praise of Karikāla. The king gave him 160 million gold coins as a present for the song *Pālai* is the desert region The city of Kāvērip-pattinam is introduced here in all its maritime glory The poet here describes the greatness, the richness and the wonderful culture of the Chōla capital and state, and gives us a peep into the daily life of the people as it was lived two thousand years ago The poem has a historical as well as a literary importance Although the poet tries to give it an *aham* colouring, it is defenitely a *puram* poem We do not know anything about the author, who was certainly patronised by King Karikala The fourth poem of this collection was also written by him. His place is known as Kadiyalūr, but it has not been located

10. *Malaipadukadām* is also known as *Kūttar-arruppadai* Perum-Kauśika has sung the poem in praise of Nanna As the name signifies, the poem celebrates music, musical instruments and musicians The particulars of musical instruments and details of the life of the hill tribes which we get here are not to be had elsewhere A description of the path leading to the hill of Nanna makes interesting reading

These poems constitute *Pattup-pāttu* A care-free life, an enjoyment of the good things thereof, love of nature, generosity and giving – all these are the keynote of the life of those days The group has a wonderful commentary by the great writer Naccinārk-kiniyar. We do not know who gathered together these ten poems or who gave them the title *Pattup-pāttu*. There are here separate poems on *kurinji*, *mullai*, *neidal* and *pālai*, but not on *marutam*.

Such is the picture of Sangham poetry that we are able to gather. This poetry has about 2380 verses, long and short, said to be written by 473 poets. (There is many a repetition in the names of the poets, and, on a careful study of the texts some of them may be seen to be quite unnecessary) Kapilar has sung the largest number of verses Excluding those five who have sung *Aingurunuru* (each has 100 verses to his credit here) we find that Avvai has sung quite a large number of verses – 59 The poets represent a cross section of society at all levels We see the poets were all poor Yet they had a very cordial relationship with the kings and the chiefs. Material goods were of the least count, fearlessness, an upright conduct, and service to humanity were considered the most valuable traits

Perhaps it is as well we sound a note of caution here. The turn of the century had not known much of sangham poetry Most of the sangham works had not then seen the light of print And most of the modern scholars had not then come of age to study them This study was undertaken by the young scholars who were just then coming of age. We should bear in mind the political and social climate at the time Popular revolt against the British domination in the political and economic spheres, against social customs, against the system of education, against Sanskrit, and the like was mounting People in India were just then studying radical and atheistic literature, in imitation of students in Britain, it was rather the fashion In such a climate of scholarship and general unrest, the sangam poems and anthologies were

being released one by one Pandits and scholars who had long been studying only such religion-oriented texts like *Kamba Rāmāyanam*, *Periya-purānam*, *Kandapurānam*, *Villi Bhāratam*, *Tiruvilayādal* and *Asta prabandham*, now had something new and unfamiliar, they avidly grabbed them From semi-religious literature to secular literature was indeed a welcome change Researches into the new found literature had now been going on for over half a century, exclusively, things have been analysed and dissected for long The Tamil people and their culture have grown through the centuries later also Literature and art have also unpredictably grown in all dimensions But having been at the subject of the sangham poetry for so long, naturally it is very hard for any one to part Research into the sangham poetry has been already overdone It is time creative and discerning minds turned to other poetry

References

1 The *Pattup-pattu* has been beautifully edited and published with the brilliant commentary of Naccinarkkiniyar by Dr Swaminatha Ayyar

2 *Vide Kuruntohai* verse 182

TIRUKKURAL

The perfection of Tamilian thought and its greatest contribution to world thought on all problems of life is agreed among all thinkers to be *Tirukkural* It is universally acclaimed as the greatest Tamil classic It has 'two aspects to its greatness – the most profound thought on the most baffling problems of existence and the most astounding economy of words and finish of style '[1] *Kural* is the one book in Tamil about which thousands of pages have been written, both in Tamil and in English But unfortunately, every thing about *Kural* is uncertain – the author, his place, his class in society, his religion, his age, his profession in life, and Vaiyapuri Pillai had taken elaborate pains to prove that the thoughts of *Kural* were adaptations of Sanskrit [2] In this respect we may hazard a remark in a light vein that *Kural* is like God – everything about both is so uncertain ! Whole volumes can be filled discussing these questions, but in the space of a few pages which we devote to the book here, we cannot even touch upon the vast magnitude of the writing on these points However, we shall briefly mention all these points before proceeding to speak about the work

THE AUTHOR

Jains used to say that the author was a Jain preceptor by name - Kunda kundācārya and that he was not Tiruvaḷḷuvar Others have said that he

was a friend of one merchant by name Ēlēlasinga We have to dismiss all such stories as fiction, as fantastic myths One legend says he was born in Mylapore, another says he took his book to the Tamil Sangham at Madurai to get its seal of approval Both these do not ring true, and yet there is no improbability in them. The first legend says that he was a castaway child, of the lowest class in society The term *valluvar* signifies a member of that community, a state public drummer But a careful study of *Kural* not once but several times over, will give any one the feeling that the book could not have been written by one of the lowest class, however gifted or inspired he might be, and however deep his experience of life might be. A verse in the *Tiruvalluvamālai* even goes to the extent of saying that 'the ignorant would say that he was a member of the *valluvar* tribe but sensible persons would ignore the statement '[3]

Then the author's religion Many writers including Vaiyapuri Pillai presume that the author is a Jain The Jain way of life was one of total negation An impartial orthodox writer like Dr Schweitzer points out that *Kural* does not preach world and life negation If anything, *Kural* extolls the full enjoyment of life – a righteous life, for noble goals, through nobler means It belies the very foundations of Jainism to say that a Jain could have written it And again the Jain sect in the Tamil country was one which considered woman as a snare, a hindrance to spiritual advancement The woman of *Kural* is the noblest of beings, an equal partner with man Besides, in the third book of his *Kural* the author extolls life with woman so much that it is entirely out

of place in any Jain scheme of things. It is a wonder how in the face all these, scholars had made bold to dub him a Jain According to legend, the author was not an ascetic but a house-holder, who enjoyed the greatest domestic felicity with his wife Vāsuki, who was the sweetest flower of womanhood

He is said to have been a weaver by profession, according to legends he might have been a farmer, a king's counsellor – we do not know His age is the most disputed question We would avoid it, except by mentioning that he could not have existed during the period of the Kalabhra interregnum, 250 to 550 A D and therefore should have lived earlier (not later) and that this may perhaps be fixed as the last years of the sangham – about 200 A D Vaiyapuri Pillai contends that Valluvar may be assigned to 600 A D, about the time of Appar [4] Pillai tries to unearth a Sanskrit source for all the thoughts of Valluvar and when the date of such Sanskrit sources goes up to 550 A D, his Valluvar comes later! Valluvar has a parallel in Manu, his polity has parallels in Kautilya and Kāmandaka, his medicine is taken from *Āyurvedic* works, even his sneezing is from the *Kāmasūtra*! [5] Can it not be that some of these Sanskrit writers borrowed their thoughts from *Kural* ? We refrain from entering into a lengthy discussion of the subject here *Kural* may be later than *Tolkāppiyam* but certainly not later than 200 A D

KURAL

After this lengthy, and to some extent unnecessary, discussion about the author, we shall now take up the contents proper of *Kural* *Kuṟaḷ* means short, it is a

variant of the *venbā* metre and has only two lines, having four and three feet in each line The book takes its name from the metre. The *kural venbā* is not an easy type of metre, there is a specific arrangement in the linking of the feet of the verses (called *ven-talai*), which has to be scrupulously adhered to Besides, there is a rhyme and alliteration, though the author does not very much adhere to these, he is generally particular to see that if the first word of both the lines in each couplet do not rhyme together, the first and the last words of the first line rhyme together Besides, the *kural venbā* has an internal rhythm and cadence which are born not only out of the sound arrangement but also by the thought content The author has achieved this in a full measure

It is called *Tiruk-Kural*, *Tiru* (sacred) is a Tamil prefix added to express the people's high esteem of the work It consists of three books and 133 chapters, with ten verses to each chapter The first four chapters are a kind of preface, the first book, *Arattuppāl* has 38 chapters (including the preface), the second *Porutpāl* 70 chapters, and the third *Kāmattuppāl*, 25 chapters The work may thus be seen to be arranged in the traditional manner of the first three goals of life The fourth goal, liberation, has not been separately dealt with by the author He seems to imply that one who leads a righteous life will eventually obtain release on the natural culmination of this life

It is a great tribute to the author that all sects in the Tamil country claim him as their own,

The Śaivas, the Vaisnavas and the Jainas claim him as their own poet, since there are no buddhists here, we are not aware of their claim. Christians of the modern day claim him as their own It need not cause us any surprise if all great thinkers claim him as their own to the end of time, because he went through life with a humble, pure and unbiased mind that was not clouded with current prejudices, because he stored the ripe and rich experience of all avenues of life in his heart and always gave expression to the to the mature wisdom that resulted from that experience, in the shortest and most artistic form The poetry was not addressed to any external being but was merely an expression of an inward peace and joy. Even the greatest sorrows and tragedy leave behind a feeling of peace in the cultured mind, from peace joy is born, and only joy gives rise to the sweetest poetry

Kural lays down a code of ethics which is universal and at the same time eternal Time and space do not limit its concepts, whereas in Sanskrit, it is never universal, it is bound up with class *(varna)* and with exigency In the *porutpāl*, he draws up an ideal code for rulers and administrators, this is based on what we would call a code of Gandhian Truth and Love (Non-violence). In this sense, it is unparallelled in the world lawbooks, not only in Sanskrit No element of untruth or violence enters into the author's dictum here This claim cannot be made of the Sanskrit *Artha Śāstras* Now going to the third part love, he speaks of love, a union of two souls which transcends the body There is absotutely no element of vulgarity, physical love has never been exalted and any one can be allowed to study this part

without the least hesitation that its thoughts may taint the young mind The author might have known the Sanskrit books on the three subjects of *aram*, *porul*, and *inbam*, and probably that was the reason he had striven to write a classic on the three which could be much more ideal and lofty than the thoughts contained in the Sanskrit books and which could serve as a beacon light for all time and to all mankind His concept of humanity, coming in the line of the poet who sang '*yādum ūre yāvarum kēlir*' (all place is my place and all people are my kin) is one which embraces all climes and times Hence, to say that he took anything from Sanskrit is not to recognise the dimensions of his writing, the like of which had never been written anywhere

The first book deals with *aram* or *dharma* in general, the second with polity and administration, and the last book with the theme of love.

ARAM

The first chapter of the available book is an invocation to God. Here the writer does not refer to any particular god, but refers to Him only indirectly in involved terms The directness, simplicity, elegance and force of the author's general style is wholly absent here and this had made critics say, correctly perhaps, that this chapter is an interpollation or later addition, and not the author's writing

Tamilnad, from the beginning of time, had the two ways of life, the householder's and the ascetic's. Legends say that the author led the most happy householder's life But *Kural* extolls both equally

It seems to preach only monogamy, which implies a lofty status for woman It does ask her to worship her spouse, but everywhere, her importance (as the orthodox phrase *grahalaksmi* implies) is emphasized. What is important is not the householder's or ascetic's life itself, but the goals of life and the manner in which they are followed.

Gandhi's philosophy of life was contained in the two words – Non-violence and Truth *Kural* enunciates the same two in a single verse, in the same order 'Non-killing (non-violence) is the supreme virtue If you want a second one, follow truth (non-falsehood).'[6] To *Kural*, as to Gandhi, righteousness is not a mere end it is the means also, it is life. The author lived during a period of hand to mouth existence, but yet, he unequivocally advocated non-receiving The present age of reason has well been anticipated by him. He enjoins man to test everything by his reason – whatever may be the subject, whoever may have said it [7] Rituals had been there in his day, but he transcends them all and pleads for a purity of the heart Fate was then a much maligned term, he holds forth the hope that even fate can be beaten hollow by undaunted effort.[8] Surely, the insistence on work and a confidence in its success is a gospel for all time. *Kural* lays great emphasis on education, not content with one chapter it devotes three chapters to this subject, besides one on eloquence [9]

PORUL

The thoughts of *Kural* in the second book all deal with polity and administration The author does not make any mention of any of the ruling dynasties in

Tamilnad But we know that democracy was unknown in those days and the three crowned monarchs ruled the land Yet his dictum pronounced for the edification of kings holds good with equal force even in the days of a democratic republic It is not arms that secure victory for the state it is the just rule [10] Where the ruler demands money from the subjects, it is just highway robbery,[11] how meaningful today, in the second half of the 20th century, even on the very soil where the author wrote this dictum !

There should be the dread of punishment (for wrong doing) but severe punishment should not be inflicted.[12] The king should restrain his anger where he can expend it, certainly there is no point in restraining it where (as in the case of a superior power) it cannot be exercised [13] The chapters on time and place for the efforts of the king cannot be bettered There is also an interesting chapter on state intelligence [14] The chapters on valour and heroism can stand comparison with similar sangham poetry. There is also a chapter on what was once known as the ' fifth column ' activity and sabotage.[15]

There is a chapter on medicine[16] – its thoughts hold good, even under the greatest advances today in medical science

LOVE

Then we pass on to the third book on love themes The 25 chaptors in this book have been distributed into the traditional two divisions, clandestine love and married love Although the author tries to follow the concepts of love in the sangham poetry, there is considerable departure from

that tradition. Some of the verses are supreme love poetry, just penned down in four or five words often a whole drama is enacted in these words All the words are utterances of dramatic characters and hence their suggestion and artistic appeal is all the greater. Similar emotional expression we do not find even in the sangham poetry.

Kāmattuppāl, the third book, is sufficient to show that the author lived a most happy and felicitous domestic life.

It is remarkable that the author has written here a treatise on life in all its aspects – a charter for mankind which applies with equal force today, nearly twenty centuries after it was written, it bids fair to apply with the same force for many a century, till eternity Its relevance is not only to Tamilnad, not only to the Hindu fold, but to the whole world, speaking various languages and following different faiths Though the charter was made by a man, it applies with equal force to woman also It lays bare the inmost recesses of the heart and that is the secret of its relevance. Born in a society ridden by caste, he speaks of a casteless classless society. Persons so distantly placed by language, climate and tradition as Gandhi, Tolstoy, Pope and Schweitzer, have hailed the *Kural* as a testament for mankind for all time

How was the author able to pack so much eternal wisdom into the so few words of a verse ? How was he able to write so many verses without in the least uncovering himself ?

References

1 Jesudasan A History of Tamil Literature 1961, pages 42-3

2 Professor S Vaiyapuri Pillai, History of Tamil Language and Literature 1956, pages 81-3

3 Verse 8 But yet *Tiruvalluvamalai* is a spurious work, it has no authority, vide my History of Tamil Literature, 11th Century, pages 34-56

4 Prof S Vaiyapuri Pillai, History of Tamil Language and Literature pages 84-5

5 *Ibid* pages 82-3 6 *Kural* 323 7 *Kural* 355, 423

8 *Kural* 620 9 *Ibid* chapters 40-42, 65 10 *Ibid* verse 546

11 *Ibid* verse 552 12 *Ibid* verse 562 13 *Ibid* verse 301

14 *Ibid* chapter 59 15 *Ibid* chapter 89 16 *Ibid* chapter 95.

THE TWIN EPICS: SILAPPADHIKĀRAM AND MANIMĒKHALAI

This is a novel term invented in the second quarter of this century to denote *Silappadhikāram* and *Manimēkhalai* We shall do well to remember that the two are not epics and are not twins. We reserve this term to the end

SILAPPADHIKARAM

Silappadhikāram, the story of the anklet, is hailed as the first epic poem in the Tamil language It is in the *āsiriyam* metre, the metre in which most of the sangham poetry was written The occurrence of the story is placed in the three cities Puhār (Kāvērip-pattinam), Madurai and Vanji, which were the capitals of the Chōlas, the Pāndiyas and the Sēras Accordingly it is divided into the three respective cantos Kannaki, the daughter of a rich merchant in Puhār is married to Kōvalan, the son of another rich merchant there, the story of these two is *Silappadhikāram*

Kōvalan is enchanted by the dance of an young dancing girl, Mādhavi, in the king's court and forsaking Kannaki, he lives with Mādhavi The two are very much attached to each other A girl is born to them. There is the national festival called *Indira viḻa*.

The two move to the beach in the course of the festivities and there they sing love-songs to the accompaniment of the *yāl* From Mādhavi's song, Kōvalan suspects quite wrongly of course that she is in love with another, and deserting her, he returns to Kannaki. He had till that day spent all his wealth and all the jewels of Kannaki in the pursuit of pleasure with Mādhavi Kannaki, as the dutiful Hindu wife that she really was, offers him her anklets, which were the only trinkets now left with her Kōvalan, who is now wholly crest-fallen, proposes to sell them in Madurai and engage in business there so that he may again acquire riches So, taking Kannaki with him, he marches out of the city at night On the way, they are befriended by Kaunti adigal, a Jain nun, who acts as a sort of chaperon for Kannaki

The Madurai part of the story then begins. Kaunti leaves them both in the care of a woman of the cowherd's class, as 'that was the one class which knew no evil ' Kannaki prepares his food and serves him An earlier dream makes Kōvalan very uneasy He leaves for the city bazaar to sell one anklet. He is met by a goldsmith who had stolen the queen's anklet Planning to foist his theft on innocent Kōvalan, the goldsmith seeks the king's presence. The king is just then irked by the sulking queen, who is angry that he evinced undue interest in the dance of a danceuse in the royal court just then When the jeweller tells him of the stolen anklet, the king intending to say, 'bring him to be killed ', actually said, 'kill him and bring the anklet here,' out of an apparent anxiety to please his the queen. The words of the jeweller could not convince the executioners that

Kōvalan was a thief, but one among them, a hasty drunkard, fells Kōvalan with a sweep of his sword. (Theft was punished with beheading in those days.) The news spreads fast and, in the cowherds' quarters, they see many ill omens The news reaches them. Kannaki rushes to the court to prove her husband's innocence As she goes along the city streets crying and challenging, the Sun god replies "Your husband is no thief; fire will consume this city which called him a thief" She sees the lifeless body of Kōvalan The body comes to life Kovalan embraces her and leaving her there, departs to a celestial abode She meets the king, accuses him of unjustly killing her husband, and shows him her other anklet The Pāndiya is famous as the producer of pearls His queen's anklet would naturally have encased a pearl in its core but Kannaki's anklet contained a ruby. Seeing it, the king realises his injustice and instantly gives up his life The queen follows Kannaki, not yet appeased, plucks her left breast and throws it at the city. The god of fire appears and at her command consumes the city She leaves the city, goes west, and from the top of a hill in the Kongu country, she ascends to the celestial regions

The happenings in the Sēra land form the third part. The hill tribes who witness her ascent to the heavens from their hill, report it to the Sēra King, Senkuttuvan. Induced by his queen, he plans to install an image of Kannaki for worship and so takes out an expedition to the Himalayas to bring a stone for carving out the image Vanquishing two princes in the north who jeered at the Tamils, he brings the stone on their heads. When the temple is consecrated,

a vision of Kannaki appears She is now fully-appeased. Many princes go there to worship her, including Gajabāhu from Ceylon

Ilangō Adigal, brother of Sēran Senkuttuvan, was with him when the hill people narrated the ascension of Kannaki to the heavens and when the poet Sāttan, who was present, narrated to them her full story He requested Ilangō to write her story in the form of an epic, suited to the three ruling houses, saying that he himself had already written the story of the daughter of Mādhavi Thereupon Ilangō wrote this poem to illustrate three truths

The poem as we have it today consists of three books and thirty chapters The metre employed is the *āsiriyam*, but throughout the book we have many musical pieces written in different metres they form an important part of the book also. The dance of Mādhavi which is the origin of the entire story has been elaborated by the author to such an extent that the poem itself has come to be called a dramatic epic Later, musical pieces are introduced in the poem as songs sung by the hunters, the cowherds and the hill tribes, other songs are the song of the ball game, the pestle, the swing and so on. Naturally these lead us to conclude that the author took the motifs for these from the folk-songs current in his time at various levels

Silappadhikāram is a tragedy which reaches its climax with the burning of the city of Madurai by Kannaki. But the Indian tradition of art and letters would not consider tragedy as the end of any art and

so the story in the third part was invented and probably added on much later, bringing together many popular stories, and some fact and more fiction. The author is never mentioned in the first two books but the third gives his biography and makes him a contemporary of Sāttan, who is said to be a personal witness of some of the happenings in the story. With the addition of the *Vanjik kāndam*, what was mere fiction has been sought to be made into history, and Kannaki is made into a historical figure Many tutelary deities are worshipped in different parts of the Tamilnad in different names such as Māri, Draupadi, Selli etc , and these are all now sought to be identified with Kannaki and the Kannaki cult, a new cult based on this fiction, is taking shape Passions have been aroused and Kannaki is hailed as the flower of the Dravidian culture The spirit of Ilangō would certainly turn in its grave if it were to know how its heroine is being distorted and glorified as a god

But, the question of age, the Pattini cult and the historicity of Kannaki apart, the poem is a grand poem The three books, *Kural*, *Silappadhikāram* and *Kamba Rāmāyanam* are considered to be choicest products of the Tamil Muse[1] and deservedly so The author bestows generous praise on the Chōla and the Pāndiya (and on the Sēra in the third part) and in this sense it is an epic for the three ruling dynasties of Tamilnad It is the only book extant dealing with the three divisions of Tamil - *iyal*, *isai* and *nātakam* It deals with all the regions dealt with in Tamil grammar and speaks at length of people in all classes of society. No other work brings out the joys and aspirations of the lower classes as vividly as this epic.

The fact that its heroine and hero are taken not from royalty, but from the common people, is significant Another feature is the reverence shown by the author to all systems of religion He speaks of Śiva, of Muruga, of Visnu, of Śakti, and of Arha as though he is an ardent devotee of each particular god. His devotion transcends clannishness Such catholicity is rare in later literature *Manimēkhalai*, said to be also an epic and a sequel to this book, is in sharp contrast to *Silappadhikāram* in this respect Its author speaks like an intolerant bigot in decrying other religions, particularly Jainism As already noted, *Silappadhikāram* is unique, as perhaps the only tragedy in Tamil literary history

The poem quotes *Kural* and so its age can be only later than *Kural* One point is that it could not have been composed during the Kalabhra period, that is between 250 to 600 A.D Probably we may assign the period about 200 to 250 A.D as the date for the main *Silappadhikāram* text, and the period 575 to 600 as the period when the later interpollations such as the third book were added

MANIMEKHALAI

Manimēkhalai is considered to be an epic also and a sequel to *Silappadhikāram* Manimēkhalai was the daughter of Mādhavi and Kōvalan. When he was unjustly killed, she resolved that her own daughter should no more take part in dances But her own mother felt that it was not proper for a dancer to abandon her profession, and so helped Udayakumara, the prince of the land, to court her. Manimēkhalai on the other hand would follow her own mother's advice and would

have nothing to do with him. When he importunes her, her guardian angel, Manimēkhalai after whom she was herself named, lifts her up by air to a distant place, endows her with some super human powers and causes her to come by a magic bowl which, when filled by the hand of a chaste lady, would go on issuing food eternally. There is a famine in the land which she helps to relieve with her bowl. To avoid the attentions of the prince again, she takes on the guise of a well known woman there, whose husband coming on the scene, finds the prince pursuing her, and thinking it is his wife, kills him. The prince's mother gets angry with Manimēkhalai and tries to harm her in several ways, but she always escapes She then learns the various schools of philosophy While thus engaged she learns that the city of Kāvērippattinam, capital of the Chōlas and her mother's place, was washed away by the sea She then goes to Kāncipuram. Aravana Adigal, an enlightened Buddhist seer and saint, teaches her the Buddhist philosophy. She then performs *tapas* (or penance) to end all future births

The story of Manimēkhalai is all a jumble, there is no plot, no hero and she is herself a very poor heroine. The only purpose of the poem is to propagate the Buddhist religion and philosophy. In this the author has achieved a certain amount of success In this aspect, namely that of religious disputation, this poem is the fore-runner of many such later writing. Chapters 27 and 29 of the book, dealing with the heroine's learning the other religions and the Buddhist religion, are a mine of information on Buddhist logic and philosophy, which are not to be found elsewhere in the Tamil language

The book is, like *Silappadhikāram*, in the *āsiriyam* metre and contains the same number of thirty chapters (over 4800 lines) There the similarity ends This book does not deal with mut–Tamil, it does not deal with the three ruling kingdoms, it does not speak about the need for the king to uphold a just rule, nor about the homage of the great to the chaste woman It speaks no doubt of *karma* and how it will bear fruit in subsequent births It refers to more than a score of *purānic* legends It does not employ any other metre anywhere, expect the *āsiriyam*, it does not have musical pieces, it does not pay homage to other gods and deities as *Silappadhikāram* ungrudgingly does But where it praises the Buddha, we have some good lyrical poetry

Though *Manimēkhalai* refutes nine schools of thought, its chief target for attack is the Jain school The author is very intolerant in ridiculing the Jain religion [2]

Sāttan is said to be the author of his poem, the epithets Kūlavānikan (trader in groceries) and Sīttalai are two epithets generally employed to qualify the name Sattan But *Silappadhikāram* does not mention Sīttalai, it merely says 'the Tamil teacher Sāttan' Sāttan always signifies Śastā, one of the village tutelary deities. The *Vanjik-kāndam* of *Silappadhikāram* says that Senkuttuvan and Ilangō learnt the story of Kannaki from the lips of Sāttanar, who said he had already sung the story of Manimēkhalai taking the holy orders Chapter 26 of the poem speaks of Senkuttuvan's expedition to the Himalayas to get the proper stone for making Kannaki's

image Obviously, it could not be that Sāttan narrated this in his story, even before Senkuttuvan had heard of Kannaki or had ever marched north Hence the statement that Sāttan told the story of Kannaki to the brothers at Vanji and also that he had already sung about the renunciation of Manimēkhalai are a mere myth

As noted earlier, this poem makes good poetry in places, but is hardly conceivable as an epic as we understand it Though it has no story interest, the fact remains that it is woven round the wanderings of a woman The Kalabhras, invaders of Madurai from an alien land, held sway there for three centuries, the third to the sixth A. D They were of the Digambara Jain sect which suppressed women, music and all worldly pleasures Generally poetry in praise of women could not have been written during that period History tells us that Pāndiya Kadumkōn put to route the Kalabhras and rescued the land from them [3] This was in A D. 575 Manimēkhalai could have been composed only after this date, that is by about 600 A D. Perhaps the third book of *Silappadhikarām*, the *Vanjikkāndam*, was also added on at about the same time

It will be clear from what has been said here that Manimēkhalai is no epic, and considering the lapse of three centuries between the two poems, they cannot be called twin epics

References

1 Bharati mentions only these three books in his song *Sen Tamil Nadu* verses 6–7

2 *Manimekhalai* chapter 26, lines 108–201

3 Vide the Velvikkudi grant of Parantakan Neduncadayan, *Peruntohai* 889

THE EIGHTEEN KILK - KANAKKU

Minor poems in the *venbā* metre had come to be written during the immediate post - sangham period; these are now generally known as the Eighteen *Kīlk - kanakku*, the poems were written mostly during the different years between the limits 250 A. D. and 700 A D The grouping of the 18 under the term *kīlk–kanakku* was done at a much later date We give below a list of the eighteen, grouped according to their subject matter

On the subject of ethics 11 books *Tirukkural*, *Nānmanikkadigai*, *Tirikadugam*, *Sirupancamūlam*, *Ēlādi*, *Innā nārpatu*, *Iniya nārpatu*, *Nāladi*, *Palamoli nānuru*, *Mudu molik-kānji* and *Ācārarak-kōvai*

On the subject of *aham* 6 books *Aintinai aimbatu*, *Aintinai elupatu*, *Tinaimoli Aimbatu*, *Tiṇaimalai nūrraimpatu*, *Kainnilai* and *Kār nārpatu*

On the subject of *puram* one book. *Kalavali nārpatu*

We observe that the major portion of the eighteen books deals with ethics, they are called *kīl* because they were supposed to deal with basic ethics – code of conduct, basic for human social living (kīl - base). We do not think the term *kīl* was used to denote that they all had only a few lines to the verse, each being a *veṇba*.

During the early part of the 20th century, many considered the *Kīlk-kanakku* poems also to be the works of the sangham age, but it is now acknowledged that they are of a much later date, although the names of some authors, and the treatment of some *aham* themes, remind us of the sangham poetry Unlike that poetry which is mostly in the *āsiriyam* metre (except *Kalittohai* and *Paripādal* which are in the *kali* and the *paripādal* metres respectively), the *Kīlk-kanakku* is in the *venbā* (except the *Mudu-molikkānji* which is so to speak in single lines). The Eight Anthologies *(Ettut-tohai)* are collections of poems by many poets, while the *Kīlk-kanakku* is each the work of a single author; there is no compiler here.

Now we shall proceed to examine the works in brief. *Tirukkurāl* is in the *kurāl venbā* metre (a variant of the *venbā*) It has been discussed earlier in a separate chapter (page 73) It may not fall within the general period here assigned – A D 250 to 700, but may belong to a little earlier period, perhaps the end of what we call the Sangham age All the other ten books on ethics are being discussed in a separate chapter on the evolution of the ethical literature in the Tamil language. Of the ten, the *Ācārak-kōvai* indicates a considerable amount of religious bias; it might have been composed after the Śaiva Nāyanmārs had toured the Tamil country and had sung their devotional songs. Its date may be fixed as about 750 A. D. and so it also falls outside the period fixed for the other books.

Taking up the books falling under the group *aham*, we find that even the title of each book defines the

number of verses in it This is a strange feature, found also in the *Kalavali* of the last group Gloss writers have always referred to *Kalittohai* and *Paripādal* as *Kali 150* and *Paripādal 70*, even in the first group here, we have *Nāladi 400* and *Palamoli 400* and *Innā* and *Iniyā, 40* each Other books mentioned by number are *Aham 400* and *Puram 400* and the short 500, *Ainkuru nūru*

Of the six here, the first five came to be known only very late, they are referred to as the five *Aintinai* and we find a historian of the 19th century, unaware of the existence of these separate works, presumed that they were the *Kurinji-tinai*, *Mullai-tinai*, *Maruta-tinai*, *Neital-tinai* and *Pālai-tinai* !

Aintiṇai 50 deals with the five conventional regional themes of *kurinji* etc , with ten verses to each *tiṇai* Its eulogistic verse says that men who do not know the poem may not know the sweetness of the Tamil language. *Aintinai 70* has in like manner 14 verses to ā *tiṇai* This is superior to the previous book in respect of language and style *Tinaimoli 50* has ten verses to the *tinai* and is written in a good style. *Tiṇai mālai 150* is perhaps on the model of *Kalittohai* It contains 153 verses, at the rate of 30 or 31 verses to each *tiṇai* Its author is the one who wrote *Ēlādi*. Since the size of this poem is much larger than the other two, many interesting passages and references are found here Some new words used in this work help us to fix its date as the first half of the 7th century. *Kainnilai*, of 60 verses, is available only in fragments Its title might have been *Aintinai 60*, in uniformity with the first two here mentioned.

Considering the five books together, we find that they all sing of the conventional *aham* themes of the poems of the sangham age. we find a certain amount of constraint and impeded flow in these works. All of them no doubt treat of pre-marital love but their treatment is generally conventional This is because of the artificial arrangement of a particular number of verses for each *tinai* and perhaps because of the *venbā* metre which gives a feeling of stiffness and affectation, against the free flow and artistic ease of the *āsiriyam* metre of the poems like *Kuruntohai*, *Narrinai* and *Aha nānūru* This leads us to believe that the literary conventions had died out and social customs had so changed that these authors find it difficult to recapture the spirit of a past age. Or, are they mere literary compositions of less gifted writers trying to follow on the model of a glorious past? Or some thing like a school composition exercise?

Kār-nārpatu[1] is a poem of forty verses all dealing with the literary conventions associated with *kār*, the rainy season, the *tinai* set apart for the purpose is the forest region, the subject matter is the-love sick maid who is staying at home, awaiting the return of her husband, the hero, at the appointed time, namely the the advent of the rains She is despondent, as there is no sign of his return The verses are in the nature of the maid's comrade consoling her that her lover will soon arrive Though there are some good verses, monotony could not be avoided

Kaḷavali nārpatu the last book to be noticed, belongs to the group *puram*, from the point of view of its date, it has taxed the brains of all scholars to the

utmost. It deals with a real battle and describes in all its 40 verses a real battle field, perhaps the only poem of its kind in the language The traditional belief is that the poet Poihai sang it in order to please Kō-cengat-chōla, who took prisoner Sēramān Kanaikkāl Irumporai in a pitched battle at a place called Pōr, and in order thereby to secure the release of the Sēramān who was a friend of the poet All the verses end with the words, 'in the battle-field where the Chōla defeated his foe' Though the resulting monotony could not be avoided, the poem has considerable merits to recommend it Unlike the subjects in earlier *puram* poems, which always speak of the virtue of giving and similar ethical topics, this poem as pointed out deals with a pitched battle and in that sense is unique There is considerable difference of opinion regarding the author, the victorious Chōla and the vanquished Sēra, and their date The author is not the Poihaiyār of the sangham age nor the Poihaiyār of the Vaisnava canon The victor Kō-cengat-chōḷa is also a canonised saint, believed to have lived in the 5th century A D There seems to be some confusion in the name of the vanquished Sēra.

Reference

1 *Kar-ettu*, or eight verses on the advent of the *kar* season is a short poem in the Saiva canon, 11th book, on a similar theme

EPIC LITERATURE

Hero worship has been an important trait of human nature throughout the centuries, among all the nations of the world. This trait has manifested itself in literature as the epic Every nation has its own heroes and they are also the greatest characters in their epics The epic literature thus deals with the basic aspirations and ideals of the nation as portrayed in the lives of their heroes in life and legend In spite of all racial feelings whipped up to a frenzied pitch by political agitators, it is not wrong to say that the stories of Rama and Krishna have continued to be national treasures from a hoary past The fragmentary references to their stories and to the translations of the *Rāmayāna* and the *Mahābhārata* found in Tamil literature and in inscriptions bear ample testimony to this But somehow the first attempts at this kind of Tamil epic writing is lost to us today

Yet we have a very wide range of epic literature from the beginnings of Tamil literary history down to the 16th century Later grammatical treatises define the content and composition of various types of literature In the book on rhetoric by Dandi, we have the first definition of an epic, a *perum-kāppiyam* Almost all the great epics in the Tamil language had been written before the days of Dandi His definition had naturally been drawn from those epics, he had also freely utilised ideas from Sanskrit literature.

THE EARLY EPICS

No single standard can be applied to all the Tamil epics Often we find critics trained in western concepts and methods of literary criticism applying their own yardsticks to measure the worth or standard of the epics It is good to know the western standards and methods but it is wrong to apply them as they are to our epics and pronounce a judgement on them Each epic poem should be evaluated not by any external standard but only by the author's own aim and purpose in writing it Each has a different aim and the real critic's evaluation is valid only if it assesses how far this aim has been attained

The grouping of the Tamil epics as the major five and the minor five is all a myth it has no validity, from the point of view of the content of the epic poems or of history The so-called major epics are not sangham poetry They belong to a much later age

Silappadhikāram is the first Tamil epic we have today The story revolves round the anklet of Kannaki in trying to sell which, her husband was ordered to be killed by the Pāndiya prince, on a charge of theft. When she came to know how he was killed, she flew into a righteous fury, proved her husband's innocence to the prince, burnt his city of Madurai and later became one of the celestials The epic has a great heroine but no hero. The story is very simple and has absolutely no involvement. Just because Prince Senkuttuvan was introduced into the story in the third book of the epic, which is in the nature of a later addition, Tamil lovers fondly contend

that the whole story is a historical narrative, forgetting that the epic was conceived by the poet with a definite purpose and is purely an imaginative romantic tragedy Ilangō, the author, was a great poet well versed in Tamil letters, music and drama, and he seems to have invented the story of Kannaki to bring into play therein these three divisions of Tamil poetry He has marvellously succeeded in his aim and today the only book which treats of these three divisions of Tamil is his book and no other The prologue says that he wrote the book to uphold three truths – that *dharma* will destroy one who swerves from a just rule, that the great will always celebrate the chastity of woman, and that *karma* will adduce the fruits of one's action The author has eminently succeeded in this also. Incidentally, he has also sung the greatness of the ruling dynasties in the Tamilnad of his days and in a sense preached tolerance and respect towards the other religions These are the main ingredients of his story and the purpose of his writing It will be puerile to look for other things in his poem – such as character delineation and similar aspects which are considered important in western literary criticism

Manimēkhalai, said to be a sequel to *Silappadhikāram*, can in no way claim to be an epic It is the story of a young woman, who declined to fall into the snares of love because of the tragic story of her mother's love She made a detailed investigation of the doctrines of various religious sects and ultimately entered the holy orders of Buddhism Its only importance lies in its antiquity and in the fact that it is the only Buddhist work extant.

Perum kathai is the next important book It was rescued from total extinction by Dr. Swaminatha Ayyar and published as a handsome volume, although its opening and concluding chapters are missing It is the story of Prince Udayanan, his many love affairs, the affairs of his son, and his ultimate renunciation The plot in this epic is not closely knit, because of the narrative which is a mere jumble of war, love, marriage and jealousy and so on There is no pronounced Jain propaganda here as Buddhism is in *Manimēkhalai* But *Perum kathai* (the great story) is important to Tamil literary history for its descriptions of the life of the Tamilians at the regal level - palaces, their glory and splendour, their arts, music and dance, their games, craftsmanship and other skills The author, Kongu vēlir, lived in a corner of the Tamil country, far removed from the main stream of Tamil culture and civilization Probably he had an occasion to tour the Tamilnad and what he witnessed there – the luxury of the people, their day to day life, the glories of their nobility, men and women, their play and pastimes, the beauty of their womanhood, and their joys and pleasures in life — made such an indelible impression on him that, perhaps to eulogise this glory of life, he embarked on the task of writing the epic

The next two important works are *Jīvaka cintāmani* and *Cūlāmani*, both Jain works Except for occasional flashes of poetry, there is neither plot nor character in them. They are one long series of adventure, amour and fighting, culminating in the Jain way of renunciation

KAMBAR AND SEKKILAR

Midway between the two in point of time comes the *Rāmāyana* of Kambar Though the main story of Rama is taken from the Sanskrit work of Vālmīki, this is a great work by its own right, easily the greatest writing the Tamil muse has produced. ‘ *Kamba Rāmāyanam* is hardly an epic It is an entire literature in itself’ says one critic For mere vastness of its size, for delineation of character, for real dramatic situations deftly handled, for the greatest felicity of expression, for humour light as well as grim, pathos, in fact all the finer emotions of the human heart, and for the expression of the finest sentiments, said to be nine in Tamil and Sanskrit rhetoric, and for uniquivocally upholding the noblest human values, there is no writer even to approach the eminence of Kambar The canons of western literary criticism can be applied to this epic with advantage and the epic itself will open up new dimensions to the principles of epic criticism

After Kambar, we may refer to two more works on the epic scale The first is *Periya purānam*, having over 4200 verses, dealing with the lives of the Śaiva saints and the visitation of God's grace on them We need not look at this writing from the epic angle, but looked at from the angle of love of God, *bhakti*, this classic is unequalled in the wide range of Tamil literature Both legend and history play a great part in Sēkkilār's handling of the incidents in the various stories but they are all strung together with the single thread of *bhakti* – devotion and self-effacement in the service of God. Similar hagiology may not be easily found on the lives of the saints of the world. Here he

combines poetry with biography and the result is a adorable literary classic Throughout the entire book, Sēkkilār the author is concerned with the love of man and the beauty of the soul There is no monotony in the narration each story has a different approach to the spirit of service and devotion. We have here people from all levels in society of both the sexes, crowned kings and outcaste untouchables, gifted singers of the Śaiva canon, and even a devotee from an alien sect Many modern concepts of social reform such as the emancipation of women, removal of caste barriers, upliftment of the down-trodden, the joy of giving and the dignity of labour seem to have been anticipated by him and handled with considerable dexterity and depth, and solutions to the problems offered. Even gruesome tales open up the inmost recesses of the heart where we see God enshrined He has laid down a spiritual democracy of love and sacrifice, which it will be difficult to emulate

OTHER BOOKS

Kanda purānam of Kacciyappa is another important work. It seeks to deal with the exploits of Lord Muruga and identify him as the Supreme Being. Incidentally he has woven many doctrines of the Śaiva Siddhanta philosophy into the work It runs to over ten thousand verses in length and the whole story is reminiscent of *Kamba Rāmāyanam*, from which he has drawn largely for characters, thoughts and situations, and language. It is indeed very popular among the Śaivas and constitutes their store house for religious discourses.

Of minor importance in narrative writing, though not on the epic scale, are the *Bhāratam* of Villiputtūrar, and the story of Nala done by Puhalēndi and by Prince Ativīrarāma Puhalēndi is the earliest of these in point of time and his *Nalavenbā*, a short poem of 424 *venbās* is easily the most widely read poem, read by students who are just being introduced to Tamil classical poetry, it is also equally popular The poem has an easy flow and grace of movement The later *venbā* acquired such perfection at his hands that he is proverbially hailed as the master of it Within its limited scope, the poem is descriptive and equally emotional The author narrates his story in a sweet manner and the praise bestowed on him is quite deserved. Ativīrarāma Pāndiyan attempted the same story on a grand scale three centuries later, he began his work with the proportions of a large epic but finished it abruptly even before he was through with a third part of the story There are indeed some pieces of good poetry but the whole poem is a failure, even as a limited narrative writing It is however widely read by scholars of the old school for its erotic tone and partly on account of the proverbial saying, '*Naidatam* is a tonic for poets', which however was meant to apply only to the original Sanskrit work of Harsa, of which this is an adaptation

Villi Bhāratam, a work of about 4300 verses is still immensely popular, and there are many who can reel off hundreds of its verses from memory The Mahābhārata story has a universal appeal and it is here reflected in this book, among those who do not know Sanskrit. The chief attraction of Villi is the mechanical

rhythm in which his verses are composed. In some dramatic situations, he is able to tell his tale in an arresting manner, but he is not able to rise to the highest reaches of poetry and fathom the subtle and inmost recesses of the heart like Kambar

Like the story of Nala which is just an episode in the Mahābhārata, the story of Hariscandra and of Purūravas, also similar episodes, have been done in Tamil verse Some scenes from the Hariscandra *purāna* are still very popular among even the unlettered, but the story of Purūravas, done equally well, has not seen the light of print in separate book form, and so is unknown to the student of Tamil *Kādambari*, metrical translation from Sanskrit is a large work but is equally unknown to scholars. *Raghuvamśa* of Kalidāsa done into 1000 verses by Arasakēsari, a poet of Ceylon, is also a long narrative poem.

Two more works conceived on the epic scale deserve consideration here. One is *Prabhōda candrōdayam*, of over 2000 verses, written by a local chief, Tiruvēnkatanāthar of Mātai, he was a patron of Vaidyanātha deśika of *Ilakkana vilakkam* fame The long poem speaks of the rise of the moon, namely Supreme Knowledge, after subduing darker forces; it is wholly allegorical and though a large number of average scholars avidly read it sometime ago, it never had any wide popularity It is an *advaitic* work The other work by the well known Sivaprakāśa svāmi, a gifted writer of the 17th century, is *Prabhu-linga-līlai*, of over 1000 verses, translated from the Kanarese. It is a Vīra Śaiva treatise dealing with the life of

Allamā-prabhu, who is Śiva Himself, and his exploits on earth Svāmi was a good versifier and the book had been once very popular with scholars who delighted largely in figures of speech We can admire here the fertile imagination of the author but it has no story or plot interest, being unalloyed allegory

Much nearer our own times is *Kucēlōpākyānam*, in about 800 verses, an episode from the Bhāgavata, done in the classic epic style, said to be written hy Devarāja pillai of Vallūr in mid-19th century. It is a small story and greatly popular even today, being written in elegant simple *viruttam* metre It is on the same level as *Nala venbā* and is sure to have always a limited popularity.

The modern age for speed and a fast living, a living for the moment, without knowing or caring for eternal values, is hardly the climate for epic literary production at any time in the near future

Reference

1 A poem of the early 19th century names the five major epics for the first time Damodaram pillai coined the term minor epics in his introduction to his edition of *culamani* 1889

THE JAINA EPICS

In the history of Tamil Epic writing of the first twelve centuries after Christ, the epics written by the Jains occupy a prominent place They are four in number and they are *Perum kathai*, *Jīvaka Cintāmani*, *Cūlāmani* and *Nīlakēśi* We shall discuss here the sailent features of these

PERUM KATHAI

Unlike the other three, *Perum kathai* is not a Jain epic, although it is written by a Jain author The author is Konguvēl of the Kongu country *Perum kathai* simply means the Great Story, its Sanskrit counterpart is *Brhat-katha* (also a Great Story) written by the Ganga chief Durvinita, of the 7th century Konguvēl adapted his text from this source, probably a century later This epic does not employ the *viruttam* metre used by the later Jain epics, but is written in the *āsiriyappā*, the metre employed by the earlier Tamil epics, *Silappadhikāram* and *Manimēkhalai* The book is divided into six cantos and is a very ambitious work, but the introductory and the concluding portions of it are not available. It is indeed a classical poem cited by all commentary writers and was universally acknowledged as a great poem. As the story is generally unfamilar, we shall give it briefly here.

U dayanan King of Kausāmbi is made prisoner by Emperor Prachōdana While in prison, he teaches the Emperor's daughter, Vāsavadattai to play on the *yāl* With the help of his own minister Yūhi and a gifted state elephant which attaches itself to him because of his superior instrumental music, he manages to elope with her and in due time marries her. Finding that Udayanan neglects his duties to the state in his enjoyment of the felicities of married life, the clever Yūhi causes a fire in which Udayanan is made to believe that Vasavadattai has died Next, he falls in love with the Princess Padumai in a neighbouring state and marries her Then Vasavadattai is restored to him He watches a tournament of balls between his queens and there falls in love with a good player who is an attendant of Vāsavadattai. This attendant is then seen to be the princess of another state and he marries her He then marries Virisihai, daughter of a hermit, to whom he had made floral gifts when she was a little girl Similar stories of adventure and love follow regarding Naravāhanadatta, son of Udayanan He marries Madana manjikai, Vēhavati and so on Finally Udayanan realises the emptiness of all life and with his wives takes to penance

Perum kathai is an extraovdinarily good piece of descriptive poem, it describes thousands of the good things of life very vividly and luxuriantly Apart from adventure and love-making, there is nothing in it to justify its being called an epic or great poetry The language is attractive and glamorous but the character portrayal is absent and treatment of human emotions and values is very poor It no doubt makes interesting reading but is nothing more.

CINTAMANI

Jīvaka cintāmani, by the Jain monk Tiru - Takka devar is in the *viruttam* metre, running to 3150 verses It is a true Jain work in this that it preaches the Jain way of austerity in life But the story and the author's narration of it are anything but austere We shall first give here in brief the story of the poem.

Saccanda, ruler of the kingdom of Ēmāngada, gave himself up to the enjoyment of wordly pleasures, along with his newly wedded queen Vijaya, handing over the administration of the state to his minister Kattiyankāra The minister gradually built up his power and one day raided the king's palace Expecting such a manoeuvre, the king had caused a flying machine to be built, on which he now sent away his queen who was then in an advanced state of pregnancy In the fighting the king died The queen landed on a cremation ground where a son was born to her and was called Jīvaka He was brought up by a merchant of the city In due time, the boy grew up and learned from his teacher his real parentage The hards of cattle of the local chief of cowherds were driven away by hunters from the hills No one was able to rescue the herds from them Jīvaka fought with the hunters and brought back the herds The chief gave away his daughter in marriage to Jīvaka the victor, but Jīvaka, because he was of a different caste, accepted her in marriage on behalf of his comrade Padumukhan, who was of the cowherd's clan Thus begin the marriage adventures of Jīvaka Next, he defeated Gāndarva-datta, a princess from the celestial world in a musical

contest and married her, much to the chagrin of Kattiyankāra. Two girls Gunamālai and Suramanjari entered into a contest of making toilet powder, and appointed Jīvaka as the judge He adjudged that of Gunamālai as the superior one Enraged, Suramanjari shut herself up in a convent, vowing that she would make him go to her The state elephant in a mad fury attacked Gunamālai and he rescued her and now married her As he was then in trouble with Kattiyankāra, Sudanjana deva, who owed his liberation from a dog's birth to the uttering of *mantras* by Jīvaka, took him away from the city by air Another princess Padma was bitten by a snake, he removed the snake poison and married her In another place Kēmasari, daughter of a merchant, was long without a marriage, the astrologer had said that she would marry the person on seeing whom she would show signs of shyness She felt shy on seeing Jīvaka and so she married him Going to another place, he taught archery to the princes of the land and married their sister Kanakamālai Then he met for the first time his mother, who parted from him at his birth. In another place girls were engaged in a ball game and Vimalai, the daughter of a rich merchant of the place, running after the ball saw him and fell in love with him He went to a shop, which happened to be that merchant's shop and sat there Immediately all merchandise, which was heaped up there unsold for long, was sold away As this was in keeping with the words of a sooth-sayer, she was given to him in marriage Then he enticed Suramanjari with his music and married her Next he went to a tryst organised by his uncle Govindan, King of Vidēha,

to the effect that he who shot an arrow at a rotating target could marry his daughter Ilakkanai Jīvaka shot the target and won her hand, but Kattiyankāra was enraged at his appearance there and in the fight that ensued Jīvaka killed him and married Ilakkanai. Next he ascended the throne with his eight wives. After some time he realised the transcience of all worldly things and, making his son king, renounced the world and after due penance attained the ultimate blissful state

Cintāmani is so called because it is said one may get satisfaction in this book in all fields that he can think of (*Cintāmani* - gem which grants one's wishes.) It is also called the *Mana-nūl* (book of marriages), which seems fully justified from the love adventures of the hero The austerity of life that should be the predominent note of Jain literature is prominent by its absence in this book The work is a very ambitious one, but its chief note is sensuousness ' The book is a fine pastime for the luxuriously inclined and it gives terribly dangerous stimulation to the senses If there is one book in Tamil literature that should be banned for the young, it is the *Cintāmani* The crime that Tiru-Takka devar has committed against society is the real source of its popularity '[1]

Cintāmani has an important place in the history of Tamil literature in this that it is probably the first book to employ the *viruttam* metre in a long continuous narrative This metre had been employed to great effect by the Vaisnava and the Śaiva canon writers of the 7th to the 9th centuries, but it is extremely unlikely that the Jain monks who mostly lived a

cloistered life in those days (9th century) could have known the hymns Hence the attempt of Devar may be taken as his own innovation based on the *kalippa* and the musical pieces in *Silappadhikāram* His attempt was a marvellous success, so far as he was concerned, although it is crude and unpolished But perfection in the metre was attained by Kambar who was his contemporary, because he had studied both the Śaiva and the Vaisnava canons very well. There may be many happy turns of expression, picturesque language, realistic and arresting description, in *Cintamani*, but the book falls short of being great poetry There is no character delineation, no drama, no play of the basic emotions, and no portrayal of human nature – in short, there is nothing in it which can be called great poetry. Exposition of the Jain philosophy is the most negligible part of the book

CULAMANI

Cūlāmani by Tōlamoli devar, follows closely on the heels of *Cintāmani* There is practically no plot in this poem, which runs to 2131 verses The king, the obvious hero of the epic, called the crest-jewel *(Cūlā-mani)*, is completely overshadowed by his son who comes to occupy the entire arena. The love escapades of the son form the chief substance of the poem The old king, having seen his children and grandchildren lead a glorious life, takes to renunciation

Culāmani closely follows *Cintāmani* in all respects – treatment of the story, employment of metre, poetic expression, description and so on. Here

also there are a series of love adventures and a sensuous description of life and its pleasures But the number of love escapades are much less, language is more flowing and light, and observations on life are more deep and ethical and thought-provoking The book on the whole makes better reading and it deserves to be more widely read than *Cintāmani* But it is far from being an epic

NILAKESI

Nīlakēśi pictures the Nīli of Tiruvālangadu fame as a Jain preacher She takes cudgels against Kundalakēsi, a Buddhist preacher *Kundalakēśi* is the name of a Buddhist epic work which has been lost But the unknown author of *Nīlakēśi* recalls many of the words of *Kundalakēśi* and relates the doctrines of Buddhism Thus it may be seen that *Nīlakēśi* is mere propaganda The whole book (894 verses) with an elaborate sectarian commentary is available The story of *Nīlakēśi* is very strange She goes on meeting and vanquishing Buddhist philosophers one after another, and finally ends up meeting the Buddha himself! Vanity could go no further

YASODARA KAVYAM

Yasōdara kāvyam by an unknown author is a very short later work in the *viruttam* metre. The poem contains only 320 verses It was written with the avowed purpose of proving that women and music are real hindrances to man's emancipation. Here a queen falls in love with the king's elephant tamer because of his music. He is a leper But she is so infatuated with

him that she goes to the extent of murdering her husband and her mother-in-law She takes birth as several animals one after another in successive births and finally a Jain sage teaches her wisdom This is an absurd story, the like of which had never been written before or after, in the Tamil language.

It is strange that these puerile compositions *Nīlakēśi* and *Yasodara Kāvyam* are classed as minor epics by a later day critic.[2]

The Jain epics may thus be seen to fall below the conception of epic poetry or great writing in the past This was partly because they were written at a time when Jain political influence had disappeared, and were written by persons who had no contact with the main currents of the contemporary national life.

References

1 Jesudasan A History of Tamil Literature 1960, page 148.

2 C W Damodaram Pillai, Culamani 1889, Introduction page 3

KAMBA RĀMĀYANAM

Two of the greatest literary achievements of the Tamil muse are *Tirukkural* and *Kamba Rāmāyanam*. *Kural* is a charter for human conduct, it transcends all limitations of time and space It applies with equal force to men and women of all climes, of all times, of all creeds, castes and classes Perhaps it was easy for its author to draw up such a universal testament, for the basic needs of man in regard to physical wants, mental aptitudes and spiritual goals are the same the world over

But, for Kambar things were not so easy The story which he took up was limited by space, its characters, action and inter-relationship had all been determined for him, he could not have a free hand in all these, and again they could not be so easily understood elsewhere than in India, and that too generally only in the Hindu fold Yet he has achieved a classic of universal appeal which can be the pride of any language and any people *Kural* has been translated into many of the world languages but Kambar has not been translated that is the only difference.

Kambar, the King of Tamil Literature and the Emperor of Poesy as he is often called, was to say the least, the result of penances, *tapas*, performed by the Tamil Muse for ages His *Rāmāyana* marks the crowning glory of Tamil literary production However,

the position was quite complicated for him. First, the choice of a subject He could have easily written a new story, but the adaption of an existing story was simpler He easily chose the *Rāmāyana* because the story here, unlike the *Mahābhārata*, was simple, it revolved round only three characters, the hero Rāma, the heroine Sīta, and the villain (in the twentieth century parlance) Rāvana Given these chief actors, Kambar had a canvas spacious enough to paint his epic The story of the *Rāmāyana* was everybody's property. So when Kambar narrates it, the discerning reader may be expected to observe the manner of his narration, and not the story itself

Again, the language had been perfected and its great potentialities fully explored by the time Kambar came on the scene We shall quote Mr. Maharajan in his inimitable words 'Kambar had behind him an unbroken poetic tradition of over a thousand years He did not have the advantage, which the Tamil poets of early Spring had Before his arrival, the Tamil language had been handled by scores of masters, while it was still malleable and responsive, the Sangham poets had conferred upon the language a delicate reticence and austerity. Tiruvalluvar had given it a lucidity, precision and terseness. The Ālvārs and the Nāyanmārs had given the language an extraordinary suppleness and a warm and moving song quality. It appeared as if all the potentialities of the language had been thoroughly exploited before Kambar's arrival But, in spite of these handicaps, Kambar's genius gave to the language fresh powers of articulation and made it serve the pure perfection of poetry.[1]

The *Kamba Rāmāyana* has to be viewed and studied in the background of real history and not of our whims and fancies Born and bred and steeped in the Kāvēri culture, the poet had not seen a bright and powerful empire around him The Chōlas were still, only local chiefs, not powerful monarchs, yet not dormant, but valiantly struggling for power and supremacy in their own land Contemporary life was not as ideal or as glamorous as he would have wished it So he pictures an ideal rule, an ideal life and an ideal people in Kōsala nadu, what he has portrayed is not real at all His ethics, his patriotism and his valour are all on the ideal plane While speaking of Kambar, we feel it is wrong to think of Brahminism or Jainism or Buddhism as forces which had moulded his narration and his outlook, we can only think of Kāvēri-ism and Kambar-ism To say that he copied this from Sangham poetry, the other from *Kural* and a third from the Ālvārs and Nāyanmārs as many critics love to imagine, is not to recognise the dimensions of his writing To one who has a panoramic view of life, of human character, its depth and innermost secrets, all these have effortlessly and unconsciously fitted into their places There is no question of copying or adapting Kambar had a great legacy in art and letters, all the good things of the past are his own He reproduces them in his work in a better from and to a better purpose, he does not learn them they are all simply his.

When Kambar chose the *Rāmāyana*, he did not choose it because Rāma was considered the incarnation of Visnu the Supreme Being, he chose it only for the

potentialities for epic creation which it offered. Kambar did not merely portray Rāma as others before him had portrayed him, he even elevated him to the level of the high ideal hero he had in mind He was a supreme artist The religion of the artist is to mould things according to his ideals, the critic can only assess how far the artist has succeeded in his creation. For aught we know, Kambar might have been a staunch Śaiva, that does not preclude him from making a great classic of the story of Rāma and if need be, even from portraying Rāma as the Supreme Being of all religion As one critic has remarked, Kambar had made three major currents of influence – the spirit of sheer aesthetic enjoyment of the Sangham period, the spirit of ennobling ethics in *Kural*, and the *bhakti* spirit of devout worship fostered by a religion in the shadow of Sanskritism before him – flow into one broad stream [2]

Kambar took the story of the Rāmāyana from Vālmiki and has acknowledged it. The Vaisnava canon had also helped him with not a few delicate embellishments The entire story, its narration and presentation, all the characters, their behaviour pattern, the situations and the drama, are all his own [3] It is wholly absurd to say that Kambar's work is a translation of Vālmīki's Rāmāyana The mere fact that the first poet in Sanskrit, Vālmīki, gave the outline of the story to Kambar does not mean that the Tamil book is a translation The Tamil book is entirely different from the Sanskrit in respect of everything except perhaps the names of the characters and

the outline of the story – different in plot, in construction, in place, in age, in culture, in physical environment, in human relationship and in accepted values and ideals We shall desist from saying more

Following in the footsteps of the Ālvārs and the Nāyanmārs, Kambar has absolute command over the art of versification , he always has his fingers on the pulse of the people and his vocabulary, be it Tamil or Sanskritic, echoes the beating of this pulse Again the dramatic situations On every page in the narrative we have a short play Characters appear, speak or act , the story works up to a pitch , and suddenly there is a curtainfall , the curtainfall is objectively perceivable as on a stage Kambar is a great master in this technique of stage management Combined with this management is the dialogue Modern stage dialogue writers can learn it with profit from our poet The very short boat scene in which Guha ferries Bharata and the royal entourage across the Ganges is a classic instance bringing into play all these elements

The boat scene is here summarised to introduce the dramatic element to the reader

We know that Rama, who was due to be crowned, was driven to the forest by Kaikēyi the mother of Bharata Bharata, who was absent from the city at the time, came to know of Rama's exile only on his return Spurning the crown which was waiting for him, he started in pursuit of Rama to bring him back and place him on the throne His party had to cross the Ganges on their way Guha, the leader of the hunters who ferried the entire royal party, placed Bharata and his brother, the three widowed queens and the sages like

Vasista on his own boat, and himself rowed the boat across. He was an uneducated hunter who did not know any of the party So as the boat was smoothly gliding over the wide expanse of the waters, he asked Bharata who the first lady, Kausalya, was

" Bharata replied 'She is the noble one who gave birth to him who had given birth to all the worlds ; she is the one, who, because I was born, renounced all the wealth of royalty' Guha fell at Kausalya's feet and sobbed, whereupon she asked who he was In reply Bharata told her that he was Guha, the sweetest friend of Rama and elder brother to Laksmana, Satrugna and himself As Guha wept, the eyes of Bharata and Satrugna became wet with tears Kausalya comforted them all in a song, which breathes the very spirit of serene benediction As we read the song in the original, the air becomes vibrant with a thousand angelic wings, which waft a balmy breeze over the bruised heart of Man

" None of the word-magic of Kambar or the regality of his tone can come through in a translation, but lest the narrative should be interrupted, the following version of Kausalya's utterance is given

'Grieve you not, my sons, grieve no more
It is as well that the warriors of Truth
renounced the Realm and came to the wilderness
Befriend this mighty warrior,
    who stands like a heroic elephant,
    with arms strong as the hills ,
and befriending him,

may the Five of you, becoming one,
govern this wide Earth
for many and many a year'

In the mellowness of her grief, Kausalya's mother-heart embraces the lowly hunter as one of her own blue-blooded sons There is in this song a certain epic nobility of thought, which lifts the reader above human pettiness

"Pointing to Sumitra, who looked like Virtue herself, Guha asked 'Pray tell me who is this lady brimming over with love' And Bharata replied 'She is the Junior Queen of the one, who died in order that unfaltering Truth might live. She is the great one, who begot that inseparable brother and showed that adorable Rama had a brother too'

"After this introduction, Kambar feels embarrassed that Guha's attention might fall on Kaikēyi This feeling of embarrassment is brought out with superb poignancy in the next stanza.

Her spouse gone to the cremation ground,
her son gone down the sea of grief,

Rama – that ocean of Grace –
gone to the merciless jungle,

the woman, who measured
with the wanton cruelty of her mind,

all the worlds, which, of yore,
Mystic Vishnu had guaged with his height –

Pointing to this woman –
Guha said, 'Pray, tell me who she is.'

"Now, Kambar makes Bharata give vent to all the pent up fury of his mind. He replied

She is the Author of all evil,
    the foster-mother of Revenge,

She is the one
    who has ground me down mercilessly

Despite my lying in her accursed womb so long,
    she is the one, the only one,

who has a beaming grief-free face
    in a world where all bodies seem dead

Guess you not who she is?

The one who stands this-wise
    is the one who has generated me

"These were bitter words, which created an awkward situation for the entire assembly. The poet makes haste to relieve them and the reader from this predicament by bringing down the curtain on the boat scene He hurriedly changes gear from a long ponderous metre to a short snappy one

Even this pitiless woman
    Guha saluted with his holy hands as his mother

The boat, like a wingless swan,
    swiftly reached ashore

"Rare dramatic skill has been employed by the poet in retrieving a situation, which in lesser hands, might well have degenerated into bathos The similarity between a boat with in-drawn oars and wingless swan is so startling that the attention of the reader is diverted from a distressing predicament to the comeliness of an apt simile and to the urgent need for disembarkation"[4].

Characterization is the chief forte of Kambar Every character in the epic has a personality of his or her own and in a couple of words we can identify the person No one is too small for Kambar in this regard. Mantarai the Kūni, Sumitrai and so many other minor characters come to life at a magic touch from the poet it is not as though characterization has been attempted only with the major characters like Rāma, Sīta, Hanumān or Kumbhakarna

We have not said here a word about the descriptions in Kambar – descriptions of human beings, nature, emotions and situations, they are there in any place we choose to lay our fingers on Abstract metaphysics and philosophy also we have in sufficient depth In the invocatory verses in each *kānda*, the words of praise from Virāta and the like, and even in descriptions like sunrise, we see Kambar forgetting the immediate present, and going to the roots of all being The philosophy so touched upon, though apparently Vaisnava, is not sectarian, but universal

So this is the *Rāmāyana* of Kambar It is only in the fitness of things that while we had dealt with the other topics in a matter of fact manner, we have gone deeper in the case of this one subject The *Rāmāyana* of course consists of six books or kāndas making up a total of more than ten thousand verses, the last book, the *Yuddha kānda* is naturally very large, the length of all the other *kāndas* put together The epic begins with adescription of the state and the city, and Rāma's birth, and ends with the crowning of Rāma after Rāvaṇa is slain and Sīta is rescued.

Many prejudiced and distorted accounts, legends and superstitions have grown round the name of Kambar that it is not easily possible to extricate the poet out of the maze of such material He is said to have been of a low caste· there were organised attempts to run down his caste, stories abound to show that he was not in favour at the royal court, that he was actually belittled by the great poetess Avvai, that he was a poor man not knowing where his next meal would come from, that he was shunted about between his place and Sri Rangam in a hectic attempt to secure the approval of the orthodox for his epic, that he was really in the good books of Sarasvati, who always came to his succour when the need arose Scholars have written the most contradictory views about his book – that he wrote his epic when there was no empire, when the Chōlas were struggling to come into power, that he wrote his epic when the Chōla empire was at its zenith, and so on. We do not enter here into any controversy regarding any of these stories or regarding his date His book is before us. He has praised therein his patron Sadayan of Vennainallūr in ten situations. The commendatory verses to the Rāmāyana say that he was a *vallal* of Tiru Alundur in Chōlanādu, he was a *kavi-cakravartti*, he published his *Rāma kāthai* on the *asta* day of the month of *Panguni*, in the presence of Lord Ranganātha, under the patronage of Sadayan of Vennainallūr in the sāka year 807 (A D. 885) Scholars have distorted all the statements reproduced here except the one, Chōlanādu It is not possible to discuss here even a single one of the controversies.[5] We shall be content just to state that Kambar wrote his epic in the year A D 885, not in any royal court, but in the presence of Sadayan of Vennainallūr (a village which has now

disappeared, a few miles for Tiru Alundur, Kambar's place) Low caste is certainly no bar to a poet, but the fact is that Kambar came of a high caste from an affluent family, and Sadayan was not a patron in the western sense but a connoisseur who encouraged Kambar in his literary efforts

There has been no other *Rāmāyana* in any language after Vālmiki and before Kambar This is natural because in all the languages of India, the evolution of literature took place long after the days of Kambar His *Rāmāyana* had so impressed learned men that they called him the most learned of poets. His book seems to have been widely popular in the neighbouring linguistic areas of Andhra, Kannada and Kerala, *Kamba Rāmāyana* discourses had been conducted in these areas and the princes and the others had created many endowments for remunerating the exponents of *Kamba Rāmāyana* there For eleven centuries since it was written, it has remained a potent force for shaping the education, culture and religious faith of the Tamilnad in particular and South India in general. *Kamba Rāmāyana* discourses still continue to attract thousands of people from all ranks of society, who are thrilled by the songs Kambar will live for all time, because his voice is the voice of Eternity

But yet, the age of epic poetry has passed We are now living in an age when everything has to be condensed - in time, in space and even in material Vast expanse of time, vast expanse of space and a luxurious wealth of material can no longer exist for us Everything in art and letters has got dwarfed, in the name of progress and advancement, and in the process, our faculties of vision and

understanding, of creative appreciation and enjoyment, have also dwarfed The total abandon and reverence, the sheer joy of absolute surrender to artistic appreciation, necessary for the study of great poetry is no more possible for us The time and leisure required for the enjoyment of the epic proportions of Kambar's work, the company, and the vast gatherings of kindred souls-are no longer possible. And so we have become physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually incapable of studying and and knowing Kambar We are content to frisk round him and get thrilled over glimpses from the fringes That is all very good But we have become unfit to know him as an integrated whole personality, as the great epic bard of all time, as the universal poet Blessed are the few who are yet able to visualise him as such a poet

References

1 *Kamban* S. Maharajan, page 7.

2 Jesudasan, A History of Tamil Literature 1960, page 163, a study of the author's section on Kambar will be very stimulating

3 For an evaluation in English of some situations in Valmiki and in Kambar, a study of Justice Maharajan's *Kamban* will be very rewarding

4 The entire passage is reproduced from Justice Maharajan's *Kamban*, Sahitya Akademi 1972, page 40-42, with minor alterations

5 All of them have been elaborately discussed in my forthcoming Tamil Volume of the History of Tamil Literature, 9th Century-Part 1

THE ŚAIVA CANON – I

The suppression of the alien Kalabhra clan by Pāndiyan Kadumkōn by the end of the 6th century had helped a revival of the ancient orthodox religions of the land Great spiritual preceptors both in Śaivism and in Vaisnavism toured the entire Tamil country, sanctifying the temples by their songs, and directing people, the masses and the elite, towards a higher and godly way of life In the Śaiva fold, such preceptors are said to be four and they have had the most powerful hold on the minds of the people from that day to this, during a period of about thirteen centuries, and the hold shows every tendency to become stronger with the passing of the years The movement set afoot by the preceptors has come to be called the *bhakti* movement, one of absolute selfless unquestioning surrender to God This surrender we find has enriched the people's lives, enriched art and letters, and enriched the dimensions of life itself by ushering in an era of universal brotherhood in the name of God The songs of the saints of this *bhakti* movement form the Śaiva canon, it is called the *Tiru murai* (sacred canon)

JNANA SAMBANDHA

Tiru Jñāna Sambandha, the first writer in the Śaiva canon, has sung 4158 verses, in 384 decads, all of them set to music. He was born in the first half of

the 7th century at Śikali in the Chōlanād. When he was three, he had a visitation of Divine Grace and from then on he was a divine child He toured the Tamil country unceasingly, singing the praise of Śiva in hundreds of Śiva shrines, from Rāmēśvaram in the extreme south to the northern limits of Tamilnad. Śaiva legends say that many miracles were performed by him The greatest of his exploits was the vanquishing of the Jains at Madurai in philosophic disputation and the re-conversion of the Pāndiya ruler back to the Śaiva fold This meant that Jainism in Tamilnad was given a death blow, it never could raise up its head thereafter as a political or social force. Sambandha, as the champion of music, had always launched a powerful attack on the Jains in his songs: they were in his opinion opposed to Tamil culture, its language, music and religion

Among the hymn singers, he was the greatest beyond doubt He attained beatitude at the young age of sixteen, but the volume of his writing now available is indeed quite large, his is the largest contribution in the Śaiva canon The greatest contribution of Sambandha to Tamil literature is in the field of music Though music formed the second division of Tamil, it had been ruthlessly suppressed by the austerity of Jainism in the three centuries, 3 to 6 A D It is to the lasting glory of Sambandha that he actually resurrected Tamil music and placed it on the high pedestal due to it, single-handed He calls himself in many of his poems Sambandha, master of Tamil and of Music Other hymnists in

Śaivism and Vaisnavism had no doubt sung musical pieces, but no one called himself a master and champion of music or gave such importance to music in his songs, and no one has been acclaimed in later literature and legend as a great exponent of music Sambandha carried in his hands a pair of cymbals given to him by Śiva for marking time while singing He was accompanied in his tours of the shrines by Nīlakantha Yālppāna and his wife, who accompanied him on their *yāl* (lyre) The variety of musical as well as literary compositions sung by him are unequalled by any other He had invented many new forms in prosody and metre, the varieties of difficult verses (*citrakkavi*) employed by him had never been attempted by any other poet or hymnist

The songs of Jñāna Sambandha give us the feeling that though the vedas were considered the supreme scriptures, the concept of Aryan and non-Aryan or Tamilian did not exist in his day He always refers to himself as the Tamil expert, the master of Tamil, and never once as the Aryan, evidently he considered all the brahmins of his day only as Tamilians and never cared or bothered to call them anything else. People of a later day may call him an Aryan, but he never spoke of himself in that manner Besides, Nambiyāndar nambi of the early 11th century calls him only Tamiḷākaran, the fountain of all Tamil, and never as Aryan In the years after Śankara, caste prejudices developed and cleavage between Sanskrit studies and Tamil scholarship widened The smārtas, who generally hail Śankara as their *ācārya*, have

never claimed Sambandha, though a brahmin, as their own, it is only the Śaivas who claim him, as their *ācārya*, this was because in the later day society, a brahmin had come to mean Sanskrit, while a Śaiva meant only Tamil.

The position is somewhat different with Appar. He mentions the Aryan in several places (1246, 2321, 2325, 2552, 2946 of his songs) He says that Śiva is both Aryam and Tamil, He is Sanskrit and Tamil, He is the Aryan and the Tamilian. The omission of Arya by Sambandha and the repetition of the term by Appar is significant Sambandha being a brahmin, does not very much care about his being a brahmin but always lays great emphasis on his Tamilian nationality, Appar not being a brahmin goes on emphasising the concept of unity, that God is both the Aryan and the Tamilian.

Sambandha has also sung many lyrical poems on the *aham* model, placing himself in the position of a maiden pining for the love of the Lord Many of such verses are supremely lyrical Among all the singers of the Śaiva canon, Sambandha is the one who had worked the largest number of miracles All of them were performed not for his own sake, but for the benefit of the suffering society at large, for individuals and for communities, and viewed in this light, the keynote of the miracles may be said to be service to humanity. The life of Sambandha thus exemplifies the truth that real service to fellow beings is also real service to God.

Sambandha has sung on the largest number of shrines, he has also sung the largest number of

musical tunes He has also referred in his songs to a large number of puranic stories He rules that we shall not try to fathom the mystery of the conferment of His Grace with our limited language and our limited reasoning faculty - it is unfathomable, those who desire to get over the ills of life should have faith in Him

Sambandha was young in years, this element is discernible in all his poetry and action The variety of difficult verses composed by him testify to his youthful vigour A child is impulsive and we find him always seeking divine intervention for the relief of suffering and the grant of succour to mankind The gifts which he received from Lord Siva were not asked for, his prayers were all only for the welfare of society His tender age is also discernible in his description of nature No other poet in the Śaiva hymns has described luxuriant nature so vividly, so profusely and intimately, and so often as he, he sings in detail of rivers and clouds, of animals and birds and trees and plants, all pointing to a sublimation in the love of God

It is well known that Sambandha carried on a relentless tirade against the Jains and the Buddhists. But yet, believing in the Omnipotence and Omnipresence of Siva, he could not help singing that Siva directed the Jain and the Sakkiya cults also and that even their untrue words are his own sport [1]

APPAR

Saint Appar, senior contemporary of Sambandha lived to a ripe old age He has sung 3066 verses Born a Śaiva, he went over to Jainism, but at the

prayers of his sister, Lord Śiva intervened and brought him back into the Śaiva fold He survived the persecution of the Jains, and by his godliness and devotion also won over the Pallava ruler back to the Śaiva fold He toured the entire Tamilnad, like Sambandha, not only singing the praises of Śiva, but also doing everywhere manual labour in the temple, in cleaning the temple premises A new dignity and dimension have been bestowed on physical labour and the sense of outward cleanliness, by the life and service of Appar His songs are always on a higher ethical plane He has sung a few songs set to music *(pan)* but most of his writing is not set to the *pan* type of music. He is famous as the master of *tāndakam*, a form of verse with eight feet to the line, capable of expressing mellowed thoughts in a lingering metre His language is always simple, direct and easily understandable, without any artistic or laboured flourishes. The feeling of devotion and surrender expressed in his poems is always direct and simple and of course profoundly genuine His *Tiru Angamālai* is being sung by all children, it is a short poem in which he dedicates every organ of his body to the service of God.[2] Divine intervention in his life came comparatively late and he was quite experienced in life at the period. Hence his language and thought express this richness of experience and maturity of wisdom, which is rare among younger people He met and befriended Sambandha and the two visited many shrines together. He was called Appar (the father) by his younger contemporary Sambandha, because of his age and his deep devotion, and this became the name by which he was generally known thereafter

His first book consists of three parts - the part in *pan*, 21 poems, the *Tiru nērisai* 58 poems, and *Tiru viruttam* 34 poems Of these the second part is the largest Each poem here used to be sung by the canon singers (known as *ōduvārs*) in the tune of the *Sāmavēda* ,[3] even vedic singers used to listen to their recital spellbound, with admiration

The second book of his songs is known as the *Tiruk-kuruntohai* It contains 1015 verses and they are the essence of his teachings Here we see the full realisation of a spiritual experience and the joy resulting therefrom Along with all the great spiritual thinkers, Appar also believes that God-realisation can result only through His Grace It is very remarkable that his devotion had universal acclaim in his own day. Appūdi a brahmin of distant Tingalūr had made many public benefactions in his name, even without seeing him Appar generally made no prayer for divine intervention by miracles, a solitary exception is the bringing back to life of Appūdi's son

His third book is the *Tirut-tāndakam*; Appar is himself known as the Prince of *Tāndakam*, Tirumangai ālvār on a later day composed a poem of 30 verses on his model The *tāndakam* is a long drawn verse with eight feet to the line. Here we find sincere and genuine feeling, charged with the deepest emotion. Repetition of course could not be avoided, and in an age when people had all eternity at their disposal, the singing of the *tāndakam* exercised such a spell over the masses which was deep, soulful and unequalled It left a feeling of solace and peace which no other hymn did The very repetition evokes tears of joy and of contrition and repentance, even in the twentieth century.

The songs of Appar, Tiru Nāvukkarasu, the Prince of Words, are a passionate prayer for the conquering of the senses and are a complete surrender to God as the requisite state therefor Where others say that the births should be ended, he says that the birth should be welcomed[4], because it enables us to see the dance of Natarāja and experience the supreme joy it confers Appar the reformed Śaiva challenged the authority of the Pallava emperor to summon him, and so things of the world mean nothing to him He spurned the pleasures of life and preached a unique freedom of the soul and his songs are a clarion call of this freedom This spirit has enabled him to see God in everything Caste and class are nothing, he is prepared to worship even an outcaste and a leper if God dwells in his heart [5] He never laments that God deserted him, he is sure of God's succour and grace; in that blissful assurance, he says his duty is only to do His service, without caring for any return It is this spirit which had made Milton centuries later to say, 'they also serve who only stand and wait' Some are fond of calling Appar a mystic, but there is no obscure or unfathomable mysticism in his sayings All his outpourings come straight from the heart and any ardent and gifted devotee can indeed feel the same. Many of his sayings have become proverbial, expressing in crisp and telling language the wisdom of the ages

SUNDARA

Saint Sundara is the third *ācārya* of the Śaiva canon. He has sung just 1026 verses Probably he lived one generation after Appar A marriage fixed for him by his parents was stopped by divine

intervention Later Śiva is said to have helped him to marry twice He had promised his second wife never to leave her, but when he is moved by the thought of the temple celebrations in the place of his first wife, in the month of Panguni (March – April) he leaves the second wife Immediately he loses the power of sight He realises that this is a punishment. But his prayers to the Lord are of no immediate avail, he has to suffer, his eyesight is restored to him only after some time Sundara is called the comrade of Śiva, but that has not helped him to take liberties in the matter of worldly ethics.

Although Sundara is a Śaiva ācārya coming immediately after Sambandha and Appar, his whole life is cast in an altogether different mould. Miracles also happen through him, but most of them relate to his own life; they were worked by Śiva to provide comforts to him in life, the bringing back to life of a child from a crocodile in Avināśi is the only exception. In this respect, he is vastly different from the two earlier ācāryas In the case of Sambandha, miracles happened to help members of the society and to relieve their suffering, no miracle was asked for by him for his own sake In the case of Appar, miracles did no doubt happen. His bringing back to life the son of Appūdi is certainly intervention by a miracle. But in all the other instances, Śiva worked miracles to relieve the suffering of Appar himself and to help him spiritually. He even afflicted a dire colic on him to reclaim him into the Śaiva fold.

Sundara however stands on a different category altogether. Except the one instance where he loses

his power of sight, which is in the nature of a punishment, all the other instances are for providing comforts to him in the worldly life In this sense, we may believe that his story is much more on the human plane than those of the other two, which are altogether on different planes

Three episodes in the life of Sundara deserve special mention One is the role of messenger of love which Siva acted at Tiru Ārūr for him When Sundara returned from Tiru Orriyūr to Paravai his first wife, she had heard of his second marriage at Orriyūr and so refused to see him So, in order to appease her and make her receive Sundara, Śiva had to go to her on his behalf several times at dead of night The second is the story of another devotee Kalikkāma who was angry with Sundara for having dared to use the Lord Siva as a messenger of love Śiva had to intervene here through a miracle to appease him and make him befriend Sundara The last is the story of Sēramān which gets interwoven into Sundara's life towards the end Sēramān, a prince of the Sēra country, himself a devotee whose songs are included in the Eleventh Canon, takes Sundara to his own city, from where both attain final beatitude

Sundara's greatest contribution is to the Śaiva hagiology where, in a sweet little poem, he says that he is the servant of the servants of God and enumerates a list of sixty such men and women of God, and nine groups of the devotees of God.[6] This song of his was the inspiration, four centuries later, to Sēkkilār in his writing of the *Periya purāṇam*.

Coming immediately after Appar and Sambandha, Sundara frequently refers to them in his songs, he mentions in particular that Sambandha caused an understanding of God and Tamil through his music[7] Following in that tradition, his own songs, all set to music, are also simple and sweet Occasionally there is a pleasant description of nature and a luscious enjoyment of life in his poems, but his mind transcends that plane In one place, he asks poets to go no more singing the praise of men for material benefits, but to praise the Lord and the Lord only[8] Some of his most moving songs are those sung when he lost his eye-sight, the affliction there was physical and quite real, his lament is indeed heart-rending[9]

The songs of these three saints is called the *Dēvāram* and it forms the first seven books of the Saiva canon Saint Umāpati says that Sambandha sang 16 thousand *padikams*, Appar 49 thousand, and Sundarar 38 thousand - making a total 103 thousand *padikams* or decads, this means that the verses in their songs would have been well over a million But tradition also mourns that the major part had been eaten away in palm leaf by termites and we are left with only 8250 verses

MANIKKA VACAKA

We now pass on to Saint Mānikka vācaka, who lived probably a hundred years after Sundara. He is the well known author of *Tiruvācakam*, a collection of 656 devotional verses This book, like *Kural*, is familiar in translation to discerning people in English and many other languages besides The story of Māṇikka vācaka is very well known. He was born at

Tiru Vādavūr in the Pāndiya country and his profound learning secured recognition by his being appointed minister to the king, While on the way to purchase horses for the king, he met the divine *guru* at Perunturai and from that moment, having had supreme spiritual enlightenment in His presence, he became His slave and forgot his duty to the king his master For this neglect of duty, he had to undergo punishment at the hands of the king He supplicates himself to his Master, many miracles happen, the king realises the state of mind of Mānikka vācaka and releases him from his service The saint thereupon goes to Cidambaram visiting several shrines on the way, dictates all his songs to the Lord Himself who acts as his scribe there, and there attains *mukti*

The whole of *Tiruvācakam* is sheer poetry, of a very high order, to use the author's own words, it is bone-melting poetry [10] The book contains 51 separate poems, of which 13 represent folk song motifs The story says that he went about mixing with the common people and children and absorbed the plays and games of the girls, into his poems to express his feelings of surrender and devotion to God. Many of these motifs had never before been put to this kind of poetic use The other saints sang decads of song in temples and, after they came away from the temples, devotees there learnt them and sang them in the temples and in the congregations. They were planned to be so sung Not so the songs of Mānikka vācaka They were not generally sung in the shrines in his time. Except at Tirup-Perunturai, Uttarakōśamangai, Tiruk-Kaluk-kunram and Cidambaram, where he was vouchsafed a vision of the *guru*, the saint did not sing at the shrines;

hence probably the legend that Naṭarāja Himself came to him at Cidambaram and wrote out all the songs to his dictation, as otherwise there was no means of gathering the songs His relationship with God is personal, his songs are just his offerings of his own soul at the feet of his master and *guru*, Lord Śiva. In all his poems, he praises the glory of Śiva, who had deigned to bestow His infinite grace on himself, humble and undeserving though he was This element is present in all his songs

It is not as though Mānikka vācaka was always in a state of ecstasy, a permanent stage reached from an experience of God's grace Far from it Like every mortal, he had his periods of darkness and pangs of separation too, and these are easily perceivable in the poems The Uttarakōśamangai part of his story bears witness to this element He had a full realisation of God and an ecstatic spiritual joy, it passed off and a period of unhappiness and despair set in, he cried to God and cried out in agony, and again he had a vision and an experience This process seemed to go on alternately until he got the final realisation in Cidambaram All these changes in experience are clearly echoed in the songs Hence the song content is entirely and intimately personal The folksong motifs echo this personal relationship and as a rule they all represent periods of joy and vision, not despair Along with the joy of servitude and supplication, there is also in *Tiruvācakam* a strain of strong conviction that he could not be shaken off In such places, the poems portray the complete trust and assurance of a little child in its mother.

Words have no use for him He first sings as the experience gushes forth vocally He does not very much think of music or of imagery There are some verses in *Tiruvācakam* where the metre does not appear to be perfect, but it is not as though he does not know prosody, such passages only portray his inward struggle He also employs the love theme or *aham*, but even here, that note is subordinated to that of praise of the Lord

It is doubtful if *Tirukkōvai* is his composition and so it is not dealt with here

THE SAIVA CANON

The songs sung by these four saints are quite large in volume In the days of Emperor Rājarāja Chōla, Nambiyāndār nambi collected the songs and grouped them into different books The songs of Sambandha formed the first three books of the Śaiva Canon; those of Appar the books 4, 5, and 6, those of Sundara the book 7, *Tiruvācakam* of Māṇikka vācaka formed Book 8 Other books were also added on by Nambi These first eight books in particular had been shaping the thoughts, actions and aspirations, and regulating the life and culture of the Śaiva community for more than a thousand years

From the sangam period to the period of Sambandha and Appar is a long jump, there had been a gap of more than four centuries This period has been rightly called by historians as the dark age because all Tamil culture, art and letters and religion

had been suppressed by the Kalabhra raiders who held sway in Madurai from about 250 to 575 A D There was religion and worship in the earlier period, but the continuity was broken A few religious writers were there in the Śaiva and the Vaisnāva Canon even during this period, but they were all in the north, in the Pallava and the Chōla territories, outside the Pāndiya country Aided by the efforts of such writers, both the religions took on the new life by the middle of the 7th century Where there is repression, there is greater effort and dedication. The Kalabhra repression was partly responsible for the sudden out burst of religious writings in the seventh century Temple worship which was dormant in the Pāndiya country was started vigorously now And with the tours of the two Nāyanmārs, a fresh wave of *bhakti*, selfless unquestioning surrender to the Supreme God, swept the entire land The songs of these saints are no doubt poetry of a high order, having intrinsic aesthetic beauty and sweetness, but were also powerful motive forces in life, urging people to religious action Whatever might have been the position of Sanskrit earlier, these simple songs in elegant musical Tamil won over all the people high and low, including the Sanskritists, because they moved the hearts of the Tamil people in a manner never before known. The culmination of this change of heart was attained two centuries later, when the Chōlā Empire began to materialise on the banks of the Kāvēri, and a new golden era of political supremacy which was synonymous with religious culture and temple building was ushered in.

References

1 Sambandhar *devaram* 1860, 2024, 2375.

2 *Devaram* verses 4240 - 51

3 Sri Subbiah Desikar of Tirukkalar once demonstrated before me this traditional singing, any carnatic or vedic music-knowing person can listen to it enthralled for any length of time Unfortunately, such *Singers* are becoming rare and discriminating listeners are becoming still rarer When such is the case in the present day when there is supposed to be a political and cultural awakening in the land, we can very well understand how the division of *isai* Tamil died out in early Tamilnad (vide pages 39-40)

4 *Ibid* 4941

5 *Ibid* 7182

6 Sundarar *Devaram padikam* 39

7. *Devaram* 7886

8. *Ibid* 7564 – 73.

9 *Ibid* 8126–35, 8188–98 and others.

10 *Tiruvacakam* Poem 40 3

THE ŚAIVA CANON – II

The Śaiva Canon consists of twelve books An account of the first eight books has been given so far We shall say here a few words about the other four books

THE NINTH BOOK

The ninth Book is known as *Tiru Isaippā* It is a very short book containing 29 poems in 301 verses by nine authors All the poems are musical pieces and hence the name *Isaippā* The book, though very short, is remarkable in many ways More than half the number of poems are on Natarāja of Cidambaram[1]. It has the only *pallāndū* poem in the Śaiva Canon. Gandarāditta, who was a crowned Chōla monarch between 950 and 957, has sung a poem on Nataraja, included here [2] The book includes four poems by Sēndanār, a harijan [3] All the poems are set to music and the *pan* is noted for each poem, a *pan* named *sālarapāni*, not found in the *Dēvāram*, is found here[4] The *Dēvāram* songs are all on Śiva and are not in praise of any other deity Here, Sēndanar has sung a poem on Muruga The songs had great popularity in the Chōla period [5] Most of them may be considered to have been composed at the inducement of Gandarāditta and his Queen Sembiyan mādēvi Karuvūr Dēva, who enjoyed the patronage of Rajaraja I and his son Rajendra, has sung more than a third of this volume.

Tiru Isaippā is also great poetry, one voicing a soulful surrender to the One Supreme, but because of the greater brilliance of *Dēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam*, it pales into a second rank

TIRUMULAR

During the Kalabhra interregnum there were religious poems in both Śaivism and Vaisnavism Tirumūlar and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār belong to the period Tirumūlar on the banks of the Kāvēri wrote his *Tiru mantiram* of 3000 short verses, which have been grouped by Nambi as the Tenth Book The name of the book itself is significant · it is a *mantra*, mystic utterance Tirumular is considered to be the first of the *Siddha* (realised soul) poets His writing warrants this belief Written in a simple and telling language, the verses employ a good amount of spoken Tamil as well as a greater admixture of Sanskrit This does not imply that he was later in point of time. He has a directness and forcefulness, born out of the harmony of complete realisation, and a contempt for those engrossed with worldly matters The very directness makes his writing the highest poetic expression of the most sublime philosophy. He re-stated the gospel that Love is God, just as fifteen centuries later, Gandhi said Truth is God He emphasized the truth that God is one and mankind is one Tirumūlar did not believe in the mortification of the body in the mistaken belief that it is a hindrance to the salvation of the soul. He declared emphatically that God did dwell in the body and so the body is to be nourished as an instrument for the attainment of higher knowledge and of salvation. He has laid down a simple code of ethical conduct

which can be followed by the lowest and the highest · 'Offer a bit of a leaf (in the place of a flower) to God, a handful of grass to the cow, a morsel of food to the needy when you take your food, and say a kind word to everyone '[6] A point to be noted about *Tiru mantiram* is that among the twelve books of the Śaiva Canon, it is the only *śastra* or scripture, ie , a book devoted to philosophy, the others are all devotional songs The place of Tirumūlar in Tamil literary history is unique He is a mystic and lays bare his spiritual experiences in all his verses He gives out the experience both in a classical language and in the language of the masses, the ecstatic outpourings of a *siddha* are also there in his work These three elements perhaps tend to make his poetry uneven and a little obscure in places, although the overwhelming ecstasy of experience and the flash of brilliance are always present. Tirumūlar is a canonised saint

THE ELEVENTH BOOK

Nambi gathered all the other devotional songs which were sung before him and grouped them as the 11th Book, along with his own poems The songs of Kāraikkāl Ammai have been collected into this book She has written two musical pieces and two other poems besides. Ammai might have lived in the 4 – 5 centuries, probably as a contemporary of Tirumūlar The *Padikams* of Ammai are musical pieces, where she describes in vivid detail the dance of Nataraja in the cremation ground along with the ghosts which inhabit the place But her other two poems are beautiful lyrics They express the innocent joy and wonder of a child on seeing the form of Śiva, decked

with the serpents, the crescent moon and the Ganges. She also expresses the highest truths of philosophy 'It is He that perceives, that makes me perceive, and is the instrument of perception, and also the object perceived '[7]

Many other poems, by familiar and unfamiliar authors, go into this book We have here three poems by Sēramān Perumāl, contemporary of Saint Sundara, *Tiru Murugārruppadai* of Nakkīrar, a piece of Sangham poetry, a few verses by Aiyadigal Kādavar Kōn, a Pallava chief, who lived before Sundara, and five poems of Pattinattar, besides ten poems of Nambi himself These poems were apparently strung together, so that all devotional literature written upto that period might be available to the Śaivas and might not be lost

The 11th Book of the Śaiva Canon is important in another way It has introduced many new forms of poetic composition. The *Irattai manimālai*, *Mummanik-kōvai*, *Ulā*, *Orupā orupatu* and *Nānmani mālai* occur for the first time in Tamil literary history only in this collection, these types of poems had not existed before Another feature is the inclusion of *Tiru Murugārruppadai* (as pointed out) and of the second verse of *Kuruntohai*, as the first poem here, as an epistle from Śiva Himself, these two are Sangham poems.

PERIYA PURANAM

The 12th Book of the Śaiva Canon is *Periya Purānam*, the lives of godly men This work holds a unique position in the language in this that it is a work of epic proportions on the glory of the

Servants of God It is quite a large work, running to 4286 quatrains, in the *viruttam* metre The language is always easy, graceful, fluent and charged with emotion The one keynote of this work is *bhakti*, devotion to God, and viewed from that stand-point, it is a marvellous achievement

The author Sēkkilār, who was also the king's minister, wrote this at the request of his king Kulōttunga II with the avowed goal of weaning him away from a study of the Jain work, *Cintāmani* [8] The work is in a sense a national epic of the Tamil people, because it treats of the lives of the Saints who lived in all the different parts of the Tamilnad, and belonged to all the classes of society, men and women, high and low, educated and unlettered, we have among the saints princes from all the ruling dynasties of the land, as well as men from the harijan classes, but they are all equal in the devotion and service to God and godly men Sēkkilār transcends the limits of time and space and comprises within the fold of his spiritual democracy even people who lived earlier and who will be living later, in all the distant climes Most of the Saints have to pass through an ordeal where their devotion is put to the severest test, but everyone of them emerges out of it victorious Nothing is impossible for the devotee, sacrifice of all earthly possessions is nothing, he sacrifies his wife, his child, himself, his eyes he plucks out, fights with his own kith and kin, he does not hesitate to punish the king's wife when she smells the flowers intended for God. Devotion to God's emblems is so intense that when he sees the sacred ash on his adversary in combat, he allows himself to be slain rather than fight with a devotee,

when a Chōla prince found the matted head (the emblem of Śiva) of a soldier on the battle field, he gives up his own life for the sin of having caused the death of such a soldier Ordinary persons become great heroes by their simple sacrifices, women also share such sacrifices as equal partners. Including the three *Dēvarām* singers, the *Purānam* mentions the lives of seven poets who are also servants of God

Written by a minister of the Chōla state when Chōla supremacy was at its highest, the poem is not only one of intense devotion, but also one of great majesty and real grandeour, the like of which we rarely meet with in all the wide range of Tamil epic poetry

A deep and fervent humanism pervades all the songs of the saints and is also very well brought out in the lives of the saints sung by Sēkkilār. Here we may say that the saints care also for humanity at large and strive to ameliorate its suffering We may even say further that they evince a transcendent humanism, which goes out to the service of not only mankind, but also the animal kingdom and the vegetable kingdom The words of Tirumular quoted earlier will well illustrate this The saints saw God in all creation and they seem to have considered service to all creatures as service to God.

Notes and References

1 *Ninth Tirumurai*, Poem 29 2 Poem 20 3 Poems 5 - 7 and 29 4 Poem 19 5 *Vide* poems 8 - 17. 6. *Tiru mantiram* verse 252 7 *Ammai, Arbhuta-Tiru antadi* verse 20 8 *Vide* Umapadi Sivam *Sekkilar puranam*, verses 19 - 21 One writer has expressed the doubt whether a capable ruler could have been led astray by *Cintamani* The answer to this is given in the words of two Christian historians of Tamil literature, extracted on page 110 of this book

THE VAISNAVA CANON – I

The picture of a general background has been drawn in the previous section under the Śaiva Canon We shall now straight away take up the text of the Vaisnava Canon The authors of the Vaisnava Canon are called *Ālvārs*, they who are deeply immersed in the grace and glory of Visnu (and who will also help to immerse us in that ocean of grace) The Ālvārs are twelve in number[1] and their period ranges from the 6th century to the 9th

The songs of the Ālvārs are collected together and counted as a total of four thousand, and they are known by the name *Nālāyira Divya Prabandham* (the four thousand sacred songs) They are in four general sub-divisions of about a thousand verses each The larger songs of Tirumangai Āḷvār and Nammālvār are each over a thousand verses and so they have been grouped into two separate books, the Second the *Periya Tirumoli* of Tirumangai Alvar and the Fourth the *Tiruvōy moli* of Nammālvār Of the other songs, the musical pieces are collected as the first volume, *Mudal Āyiram* (the first thousand), and the non-musical pieces grouped as the third book called *Iyal pā*

We shall examine below, the songs of the Āḷvārs, not in the order in which they are grouped in the Canon, but in an approved chronological order.

Bhattar, Vedānta Dēsikan, Manavāla māmuni and many others have arranged the authors differently, but we would follow here the order adopted by Tiru Arangattamudanār, the earliest of all, in his *Rāmānuja Nūrrantādi* Any discussion of dates is beyond the scope of our work

EARLY ALVARS

The first Ālvārs (*Mudal* ālvārs) were three - Poihai, Bhūtam and Pēy, and all of them hailed from the Pallava country There was Kalabhra rule in the Pāndiya country during the 3rd to the 6th centuries and no saint, Vaisnava or Śaiva, hailed from the Pandiya country during that period.[2] The first three Ālvārs sang their songs during this period (5 – 6 centuries). Poyhaiyār was born on a golden lotus in a cool tank in Kānci Bhutattār was born on a *mādhavi* flower (the *hiptage* creeper) in Kadal mallai (Mahabalipuram), and Pēyār was born on a crimson lily in a well in Tiruvallikkēni (Madras), hence they are called *ayōnija* (not born from a mother's womb)[3]

A beautiful legend says how they met one dark night in the corridor of a house in Tiruk-Kōvalūr and how they saw a vision of Tirumāl (Visnu) there and began to sing His praises[4] As there were not enough space for the three of them, they were standing, Visnu entered amidst them, and they felt squeezed Poihai used the sun as a lamp and Bhutam used devotion as a lamp, to find out the cause of the squeezing Peyālvār saw the Lord there and began to describe Visnu whom the saw They have each sung an *antādi* of 100 *venbās*, known as the first, second and third *antādis* The *mantra namō-nārāyanā* finds place in a song of Poyhai, later it plays a very prominent

part in the life and songs of Tirumangai ālvar Poyhai mentions Tiruvēnkatam frequently in his songs, Tiruvarangam once, there is also a mention of Kōval *idaikali* (corridor) in his songs (86) The other two ālvārs mention many shrines in their songs, including several in Kānci itself Bhūtattār calls himself the great fortunate Tamilan (74) Bhūtam and Pēy mention Māmallai and Vinnagar Critics have remarked that as the shrines in these places were built in the 7th century, these ālvārs should have belonged then or later This is not correct The shrines existed much earlier, Narasimha and his successors built the monoliths, this does not mean that the temple also came later Hence the references do not affect the antiquity of the ālvārs

These are the early poems in Vaisnavism and they show a considerable degree of simplicity and religious tolerance, and a wonder and joy, born out of a full and limitless experience of divine grace

TIRUP-PANALVAR

Tirup-Pānālvār, a bard of the lowest caste in society, was an ardent devotee of Visnu at Sri Rangam He used to play his *yāl* instrument on the southern bank of the Kāvēri, in praise of the Lord, as a kind of service to Him. The Lord made known the devotion of the low caste *Pāna* by ordering the high caste priest to carry him into the temple on his shoulders The *Pāna* has sung a short poem of ten verses[5] in praise of the various organs of the physical form of the Lord of Sri Rangam Mentioning each feature, the poet pours forth his longing for Him in the manner of a girl yearning for her lover. This one song has earned for him ālvār-hood,

TIRU MALISAI

Tirumalisai ālvār, of the place of that name on the other hand, is a high caste brahmin and a bigot. He always heaps abuse on the Śaiva religion; nor does he spare Jainism or Buddhism He has written two poems, an *antādi* of 100 *venbās* and *Tiru chanda viruttam* of 120 *viruttam* verses, set in a rigid rhythmic pattern[6]. His works are philosophical in content but the lyrical quality is mostly absent With him, the newly evolving Vaisnava religion definitely slides into bigotry and intolerance

Some of his verses contain great truths spoken in very simple lucid language in an arresting manner, but the general speed of the jingle and its mechanical rhythm wipe out all poetry from the songs, yet we shall see one verse 'The tides build up even out of the snow white wide sea, they roll back and merge with the same sea, in like manner, all that are born and that die, and walk and live, out of You, finally are merged in You such is Your nature (10) '[7]

TONDAR ADIPPODI

Tondaradippodi (the dust of the feet of God's devotees) has sung two poems[8], one the *Tiruppalli-elucci* and the other *Tiru Mālai* The first consists of ten verses, intended to rouse the Lord from His sleep in the early morning and obtain His grace *Tiru Mālai* means the Holy Garland The verses show a high degree of violent bigotry[9] and intolerance, and at the same time of intense devotion also According to his biography, his life consisted of extremes and they explain also the extremes in his songs He makes a complete surrender of himself to God and

revels in the resulting joy To him, the Kavēri is more holy than the Ganges because Sri Rangam is on the Kāvēri[10] The appeal of the two poems to the Vaisnavas is so great that they are required to recite them daily in their prayers 'My Lord of Sri Rangam, I have no place and no land no kith nor kin. I hold fast unto Thy feet, Thou that art Supreme, of azure hue I cry out to Thee, O Krisna Who is my support, other than Thee?'[11]

KULASEKHARA

Next we take up Kulasēkhara, a Sēra prince of the west coast.

He calls himself the Lord of Kolli, Kūdal (Madurai) and Kōli (Uraiyūr), this is mere vanity and does not signify much Yet, the fact that he was a prince, was in those days very significant for the cause of Vaisnavism; here he is the only princely poet in the Canon The Pandiya prince had been of great help to Periyālvār, but he was no poet The prince of the Sēra dynasty was styled 'perumāl', irrespective of whether he was a Śaiva or a Vaisnava, we find the Śaiva poet called Seramān - perumāl in an earlier period. Here he is Kulasēkharap-perumāl and so, his songs are *Perumāl Tirumoli*

His poems are ten, with 105 verses He was most attracted by the Rāmāvatāra and most of his poems are a passionate adoration of this aspect of Visnu. Like Periyāḷvār, he is fond of celebrating the child-hood of Rāma and Krisna and he has sung the first ḻullaby song[12] in Tamil.

The first three poems are in praise of Sri Rangam. Two poems are on the boyhood of Krisna. In the first, the girls in the Āyar pādi chide him for being unfaithful to each in turn The second is the very moving lament of Dēvaki, the real mother of Krisna who bemoans her own fate in not being able to rejoice in the boyish pranks and feats of the boy, while it was given to Yasōdai to witness and rejoice in them. There is also another moving poem from the lips of Daśaratha, the father of Rama, who mourns his ill luck in sending Rama away to the forest The next poem in praise of Tillai Tiruccitrakūtam, is a continuous narrative of the entire story of the Rāmāyana

All the poems of this Ālvār prince are supremely lyrical in quality and his songs on Tiruvēnkatam and Vittuvakkōdu[13] may be said to be unsurpassed in emotional fervour and supplication He desires to be born as a bird, a fish, a cup, a tree, a rock, a stream, a step - in fact anything on His Tiruvēnkatam hill Even if a mother pushes her child away, it can only cry for her affection and attention, so is the Ālvār The Vittuvakkōdu song contains a proverb in each verse

The lament of Daśaratha[14] after Rama left the city for the forest as instructed by Kaikēyi is one of his best lyrical pieces The poet really becomes the father and pours forth all the pangs of separation from the son, The *nayaka - nayaki bhāva* is frequent in devotional poetry Periyālvār's role of mother to Krisna in his songs is unique But here Kulasēkhara's role of father for Rama is most unparalleled For

descriptive poetry in the most picturesque and lyrical language, Kulasēkhara is a master in the Vaisnava canon Probably he supplied many thoughts to Kambar for his epic composition

PERIYALVAR

Next we go to Periyālvār He was a brahmin from Sri Villiputtūr, named Visnucittan He was a spiritual preceptor to the Pandiya ruler, Sri Vallabha. According to tradition, he established in the king's court that Visnu was the Supreme and got the prize of a purse of gold When Visnu was taken in procession along the streets, he had a *darśan* of the deity and fearing that someone may cast an evil eye on Him, he sang a *pallāndu* poem[15], meaning 'may You live long in all this glory' Usually it is the mother who does a ritual to remove the evil eye Because he did this and because he sang almost all his songs on Krisna, placing himself in the position of his mother Yasōda, he has been hailed by the grateful Vaisnava community as the Periya Ālvār (the Elder Ālvār) As also the foster father of Āndāl, who gave her away in marriage to Visnu, this title seems appropriate to him

Each of the poems of an ālvār is generally known as the song or *Tirumoli* (holy word) of that ālvār Periyālvār has sung 473 verses in 45 poems, they are the *Periyālvār Tirumoli* The first poem is the *Pallāndu*, the *Nālāyiram* (the Vaisnava Canon) quite fittingly opens with the *Pallāndu*

Most of his songs are devoted to the Krisnāvatāra, there are also a few addressed to Rama. His poems

give us the most delightful picture of childhood in the Tamil language Among all divine children, the child Krisna has a very large number of lovely stories woven round him. This child and his pranks are the greatest favourites with the Ālvār. Ālvār was a bachelor, it is astonishing how he has been able to enter into the mind of Yasōdai and re-live the childhood days of Krisna in Gōkulam The birth of the child, the beauty of his form, the child in the cradle, the address to the moon, the lisping of words, the clapping of hands - and many other little acts related to the child are the subject matter of his poetry. All devotional literature teems with instances of the poet becoming mentally the lady-love and pining for the love of the Lord But Periyālvār really becoming the mother is the most unique feature in all literature.

His songs are some of the greatest poetry, not only in the Vaisnava Canon but in all literature As contributions to Tamil literature, his songs are the first in many respects His is the first *pallāndu* poem, his *pillai-Tamil* motifs[16] have helped the evolution of the poem as a type of literary composition in later years, his *tālāttu* along with Kulasēkhara's is the first lullaby, giving rise to a vast wealth of such literature in the next thousand years

ANDAL

Āndāl, the only woman poet among the ālvārs, is the adopted daughter of Periyālvār Ālvār found her as a baby in his flower garden, and the man who was a confirmed bachelor brought up this girl, as a mother would have When she came of age, she refused to think of a mortal for a groom She decked

herself as Krisna's bride She even put on the garlands intended for Him, to see if they were handsome enough to be worn by Him! This irked Ālvār not a little, but Viṣnu Himself approved of it She chose Sri Ranganātha for her bridegroom and her life ends with the marriage and her blissful union with her Lord at Sri Rangam

Her songs numbering in all 173 verses form *Tiruppāvai* and *Nācciyār Tirumoli*.[17] *Tiruppāvai* seems to have been taken from a popular theme of the period where girls go in groups to a river or tank for a bath and pray for the succour of their patron deity. Here Āndāl calls upon her companions to wake up and go with her, singing the praise of the Lord Krisna and seeking His grace on themselves in order to get good food, good cows and milk, good dress and good husbands, and ultimately asking Him to take all of them, of the *āyar* clan, as His servants for ever and ever *Tiruppāvai* is a household word in the Vaisnava community, recited by them daily, particularly in the month of *Mārgali*. *Pāvaip-pāttu* seems to have enjoyed immense popularity not only in Tamilnad but in overseas territories also, it is said to be the occasion for a national festival in distant Siam, where it had travelled during the days of the Chōla conquests and got absorbed in popular lore [18]

We have heard critics remark that Āndāl often lapses into indelicacy in expressing her longing for her divine lover [19] One who studies her poems deeply cannot agree with such a criticism. The words are uttered by Āndāl assuming the role of a *gōpi*; it is certainly the ethereal and other-wordly longing of a

love-sick damsel pining for the love of her lover. The theme is not wholly religious, it is partly religious and partly playful, Krisna is not merely the Supreme Being, the Transcendental One, but also the Immanent One, who can be a playmate and comrade. She is a real *gopi*, the role is not merely assumed Many songs in Periyālvār and one in Kulasēkhara are to be studied in the background of Krisna's *krīdā* The words spoken are set in a dramatic situation, and are placed in the lips of unlettered (and unsophisticated) *āyar* children If we remember these three elements, namely, the immanence of Krisna, the drama, and the children of the *āyar* clan, the poem can never appear to be sensuous or un-womanly.

Her other songs are equally valuable Her *Tirumoli* opens with a worship of Manmata the god of love, but the narration of her dream wedding with her Lord is the most important and the most lyrical of all her poems[20] The poem has got absorbed into the ritual of all the Vaisnava communities; it is even today sung at their wedding ceremonies This is a beautiful lyric, narrating the details of the marriage ceremony All the parts of the function are so graphically described by her that reading them, we even forget ourselves and imagine that we are actually in the midst of such a ceremony. The Vaisnavas are really fortunate to have such a poem. We can go on choosing such poems and introducing them – her address to the conch, to the clouds, flowers and birds. Two of the songs are on the traditional *aham* model.

Notes and References

1 Some traditions omit Madhura kavi (who was merely a *bhakta* of Nammalvar and not a *bhakta* of Bhagavan) and Andal (who was a woman) and say that the Alvars are only ten

2 The Pandiya Kingdom was under the rule of the Kalabhras at the time, and so the climate for devotional singing in any *vaidika* religion did not exist there The *Mudal* Alvars of this period were born in the Pallava Kingdom, in the Saiva Canon, Karaikkal ammai and Tirumular of this period lived in the Chola Kingdom

3 In the Vaisnava Canon, [only Tiru Mangai, Tirup-Panalwar, Kulasekhara and Nammalvar are said to be not brahmins, but in the light of this *ayonija* origin, there is no basis for holding these three also to be brahmins

4 *Vide Guruparamparai* six thousand, the chapter on the three alvars

5. The penultimate poem in *Mudal ayiram,* beginning *Amalanadipiran*

6. *Vide Nan mukan Tiru-antadi* (verses 2382–2477) in *Iyal-pa* and *Tiru chanda viruttam* (verses 752–871)

7 Verse 761

8 Both form part of *Mudal ayiram,* verses 917–926 and 872–916 therein

9 Cf verses 8 and 9 of *Tiru malai* (879 and 880) in *Mudal ayiram*

10 Verse 894, *Ibid* 11 *Ibid* 900 12 *Ibid* 719-729. 13 *Ibid* 677–687, 688–697 14 *Ibid* 730–740 15 The opening poem of *Nalayiram,* considered to represent the *pranava* OM to be prefixed to the entire *Nalayiram* 16 *Ibid* decads 3, 4, 5, 6 etc 17. *Ibid* 474–503 and 504–646

18 T P Meenakshisundaram, *Sayamil Tiruppavai – Tiruempavai* page 94 19 Jesudasan History of Tamil Literature 1961, page 107 *Vide* also the paragraph on Pavaip-pattu in the chapter, Minor Poems II 20 *Mudal ayiram* verses 556–566.

THE VAISHNA CANON – II

TIRUMANGAI ALVAR

Tirumangai ālvār is one of the two ālvārs who have sung a large number of verses and on a large number of shrines (86) The *Periya Tirumoli* or the second thousand is composed entirely of his songs. Besides this, there are three important poems of his in the *Iyalpā* also Generally a picturesque and dramatic setting is given to the lives of the ālvārs and the story of Tirumangai is certainly the most picturesque of them all. He was a *kallar* (robber clan) chief of Mangai in Tiruvālinādu, near modern Sīkāli in Tanjāvūr district He married Kumudavalli and at her instance began feeding thousands of *bhāgavatas* daily. When he was short of funds, he took to highway robbery To test him, Visnu with his consort appeared on the road as a newly wedded bridegroom and bride Unable to remove the rings on His toes, Mangai applied his teeth to them When even this failed, he asked the bridegroom, 'Have you cast a spell *(mantra)* over these?' He said Yes, and whispered into Tirumangai's ear the eight mystic syllables *(astākasra)* Immediately, the erstwhile robber came under the influence of the Lord and straight away burst into song[1] The first song itself is very famous, it describes the learning of the Lord's name by the Ālvār and the conferment of all good thereby.

The total of his songs is 1253 verses He has toured the entire Tamilnad Quite contrary to tradition, his writings show considerable scholarship. His *Tiru Elukūrrirukkai*[2], like Sambandha's before him, has a very intricate number arrangement which only a good scholar could have mastered He has sung two *madal* poems[3], the smaller one and the larger one The *madal* is a theme from the sangham poetry, there it is the male who threatens to ride the *madāl*, the palmyrah horse, out of a determination to give up his life through unrequitted love, but here it is the woman, who is however strictly prohibited from doing so, according to the sangham tradition

His *Periya Tirumoli* contains besides *Tirumoli*, two beautiful poems, *Tiruk-Kuruntāndakam* and *Tiru Nedun-tāndakam*.[4] The first, a short one of 20 verses, is modelled on *Tiru Nērisai* of Appar, with shorter lines, and the second, a longer one of 30 verses, is modelled on *Tiru Tāndakam* of Appar, with longer lines The latter poem, being longer in each line, has an easy flow of the subject, particularly in its verses 11 – 30, which are on the *aham* theme, the long drawn sound effect, the subject and the music all together confer on the poem a quaint and sensitive touch.

But by far the greatest work is of course his *Tirumoli*. The opening song is the one he sang when he came directly under the influence of his Master, Visnu; it is an outburst of ecstatic delight on being taught the Lord's name The same delight in the name is expressed by him elsewhere also One poem on Tiruvēnkatam prays to the Lord fervently to

accept him, in spite of his many imperfections, (beginning *Tayē tandai enrum*, 1028) is a very moving and haunting one Like all the saintly singers everywhere, he says here that he has committed all sins, he cries that he is now surrendering himself to the feet of Venkatēsa and prays to Him to receive him and bestow His grace. (A critic, cursed with the bane of literalness, remarks that he counts murder, deceit and debauchery among his crimes We are sad to note that he has altogether missed the spirit and the message of his poetry [5]) Another poem enumerates the occasions when He gave refuge to humble folk like Guha and prays that he also be accepted.[6] Speaking of the Tiru Naraiyūr shrine, he says that this temple on a raised base was built by Kōc-Cengat Chōla, who had already built seventy similar temples for Śiva [7] One poem here on *sappāni*[8] (asking the infant child to clap his hands) is on the *pillai-Tamil* pattern of Periyālvār. Another poem of short lines,[9] is in the form of an entreaty by a lovesick maiden to the birds and other animals to call on the Lord to arrive here, it is on the model of Appar's *Tiru Angamālai*[10] and is a delight to children, this is a poem on the love theme, most sensitive and poignant There is also a *sālal* poem, a song of game for girls, which might have been a model for Mānikkavācaka's song of the same name, similar is also the *kōttumbi* poem [11] The refrains like *pongattam pongō* and *kulamani dūram*[12] are perhaps reminiscent of the folksongs of the ālvār's *kallar* clan, their significance has been forgotten

Considering the poems as a whole, one cannot but be impressed by their literary achievement.

There may not be great philosophical content in the songs, but their literary relish and their appeal as *aham* poems are immense The appeal of childhood seems to be a favourite theme with all the Vaisnava poets, because of the immense scope in the portrayal of the Lord as the lovely child Krisna, our ālvār is no exception

Almost all his verses, seem to echo words, phrases, thoughts and patterns of the Śaiva Nāyanmārs [13]

From the ālvār's allusions to the Pallava rulers of Kānci, it has been established that he was a chief under Dantivarma (775–825 A D).[14] He has sanctified twelve small shrines round Tiru Nagari, his place. He has also made many lavish endowments and added many structures to the Sri Rangam temple His name will always be associated with these two places

NAMMALVAR

Lastly we go to Nammālvār The story of Nammālvār is briefly told He was the son of Kāṛi of Tirukkuruhūr in the extreme south of Tamilnad Though he was born through the special grace of Visnu, he kept dumb His parents placed him under the *puli* tree (tamarind, the *sthala vruksa* of the temple at Tirukkuruhūr) The child would not see anyone except Him, and would not speak with anyone Sixteen years passed Madhura kavi came there directed by a divine light, and to him the ālvār opened his eyes and deigned to speak It is said that the forms of Visnu enshrined in the various temples in Tamilnad and beyond appeared before the ālvār and he sang his songs on them

He has sung four poems, *Tiru Viruttam*, *Tiru Āsiriyam*, *Periya Tiru Antādi* and *Tiru Vāymoli*, giving out the substance of the four vēdas, *Rig*, *Yajus*, *Atharva* and *Sāma* respectively His poems are known among the Vaisnavas as the fifth vēda His very name *Nam-ālvār* shows the endearment he had among them (*Nam ālvār* – our ālvār) He is the last of the ālvārs and the first of the ācāryas (preceptors). Nāthamuni is said to have taken instruction directly under him, not personally but by revelation, and continued the spiritual line going on to Ālavandār and Rāmānuja

The first three poems contain 100, 7 and 87 verses respectively They are grouped under *Iyalpa* But his reputation rests on the last, *Tiru Vāymoli* (sacred utterances), which runs to 1102 verses. All the verses are in one *antādi* arrangement, the legend that all the forms of Visnu in the various temples appeared before him to receive a song from him is understandable, from the fact of this *antādi* arrangement.

Tiruvāymoli is said to contain the essence of the philosophy of Vaisnavism, and that is said to be its greatness It is the one basic scripture for Vaiṣnavism, much more than the vēdas Later preceptors and writers have extracted all their metaphysical and philosophical concepts from this book The Vaisnavas derive great satisfaction in giving it a Sanskrit name such as the *Dramidōpanisad*, *Drāvida vēda sāgaram* and *Drāvida brahma gīta*

His *Tiru viruttam* deals with love themes on the model of the earlier sangham *aham* poetry, on the

religious plane. It sings of the soul's determination to break the fetters which bind it to matter, and expresses its yearning for union with God.

This ālvār's poetry enshrines the highest spiritual wisdom of the Vaisnava cult and in this respect he occupies the same exalted position that Mānikkavācaka occupies in Śaivism As poetry, the *Tiruvāymoli* is considered to be 'heart melting poetry, giving us the quintessence of divine experience'. His is not mere wisdom. it is a blend of wisdom, emotion, surrender and realisation He has the god-vision in an extraordinary measure All his senses perceive only God, it is always a direct realisation through absolute surrender. He often expresses this realisation in emotion-charged love lyrics He addresses the world and gives out his message of love and hope, of surrender and joy in service Attunement to the divine will liberates one even here, in this birth

Many of his songs on the love theme are supremely poetic. There are indeed inspired poetic writing and brilliant flashes when he lays bare the inmost recesses of the heart pining for the love of the Lord. 'Art thou not mine own, little myna? I had prayed to thee to convey my all-consuming love to God, but thou didst not I have now become weak and helpless through pining after him. Thou mayst go even now, and find some one who can feed thee as lovingly as I had done (so that I may pass away without any anxiety for thy future welfare).'[15] What a poignant and intimate affection even towards a pet, born out of the intense love for God!

Poetic tradition in the Tamil language has been of a very high standard There have been many ālvārs whose poems had conformed to those standards. Many of the poems of this ālvār also, following the love theme, hail in that tradition as great poetry. If tradition regarding his early life is to be credited, one cannot but marvel at the life-experience and love-experience which find expression in his songs When one attains a spiritual oneness with the All-pervasive Being, an awareness of all experiences, spiritual, physical or emotional, accrues

MADHURA KAVI

Madhura Kavi, the last of the ālvārs, is remembered as the devotee who discovered Nammālvār. It is remarkable that he has been raised to ālvār-hood, though he has not sung a single line on Visnu: his ten verses[16] are on his master Nammālvār, he even says that he knows no other god than Nammālvār Yet such has been the discerning devotion of the Vaisnavas that his short poem forms part of their daily prayer book.

AMUTANAR

Amutanār, in the days of Rāmānuja, sang an *antādi* poem of 108 verses in praise of Rāmānuja. Its poetic and philosophic content was of such a high quality, that the ācārya included it, at the request of the Vaisnavas, in the Vaisnava canon, to bring up the total number of verses in the canon to four thousand verses The *antādi* contains a number of verses of good lyrical quality Its importance also lies in the fact that by its arrangement of the list of āḷvārs, it sheds some light on their chronology also,

Periya Āccān Pillai has written commentaries on the entire *Nālāyiram Tiruvāymoli* of Nammālvār has been elaborated in the five commentaries known as the 6, 9, 12, 24 and 36 *āyirappadi* by different authors in different periods, the last is also known as the *Īdu*, the 24 is by Pillai Vedānta Dēsikar, founder of the *Vadakalai* sect, has written a commentary on the short work of Tirup-Pānālvār Others have also written additional commentaries on some other works

Notes and References

1 *Vide* the section on this alvar in *Guruparamparai*, six thousand

2 Verse 2672 in *Nalayira prabandham*

3 *Ibid* 2673 - 74

4 *Ibid* verses 2032–51 and 2052–81

5 Jesudasan (book quoted) page 112 He goes on to say further that it is quite credible that as a prince he was responsible for bloodshed and lived a life of sensuality from which he sought deliverence The remarks of the writer here are quite off the mark Tirumangai was chief of a *kallar* (robber) clan He fell in love with Kumudavalli and married her The kallas, through they committed highway robbery, had their own codes of ethical conduct they never killed, except in battle, they were never untruthful, and they never misbehaved with women It is amazing that the present author, a literary critic at that, tries to read the crimes of murder, deceit and debauchery into the words of the alvar himself When Manikkavacaka says he is worse than a dog, we do not take him at his word, so also Tirumangai alvar

6 *Nalayıram* 1418

7 *Ibıd* 1505 The Saıva Saınt Appar ın the earlıer century also mentıons thıs fact - vıde *Adangal muraı* 6959

8 *Nalayıram* 1888–97 9 *Ibıd* 1942–51

10 *Adangal muraı* 4240–51. 11 *Nalayıram* 1678–87

12 *Nalayıram* 1858–67 and 1868–77

13 Hıs two *tandakam* poems and poems on the same metre such as *Perıya Tırumolı* 2 10, and 7.10, 8.1, 10.10 etc.

14 *Nalayıram* 1127 15 *Ibıd* 2715

16 The last decad of *Mudal ayıram*

THE ITIHĀSAS

In Sanskrit lore, the *Itihāsas*, or grand epics, are considered to be three - the *Rāmāyana* dealing with the story of Rāma written by Vālmīki, the *Mahābhārata* dealing with the story of the Pāndavas and the Kauravas written by Vyāsa, and the *Bhāgavata*, the story of Krisna, written by several writers in several books All these have been rendered into Tamil at various stages in Tamil literary history They are supposed to deal with the *avatārs* of Visnu and his exploits on the human level There are several such grand epics in verse dealing with the exploits of Śiva, but they are all termed *purāna* Epics usually are the exploits of human beings, Rāmā and Krisna have come down to the human plane and hence their exploits are *itihāsa* But Śiva has not come down to the human plane, hence his exploits are not *itihāsa* Only the *Skanda purāna*, though termed a *purāna*, yet holds a unique place as a grand epic or *itihāsa* It has also been translated into Tamil verse We shall examine here such books of an epic character, available in translations of the hoary past. *Itihāsa* implies an old story (*iti iha āsa*, it was said so).

The Mahābhārata in Sanskrit is the largest epic poem in all world literature, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer, the greatest books of the West, are together just a tenth of the Sanskrit epic,

RAMAYANA

The *Rāmāyana* of Kambar is the most famous epic in all Tamil literature It has been dealt with in a separate section It is not a translation but an original work, fit to rank with the greatest books of the world Besides the work of Kambar, we learn there were other *Rāmāyanas* in the *venbā* and the *asiriyappā* metres, written before the 9th century, but they were all lost There is also a very large *Rāmāyana venbā* in the last years of the 19th century, modelled on Kambar.

MAHA BHARATA

The Mahābharata has been associated with the Tamilnad, from the beginnings of Tamil literary history Muranjiyūr Mudināgarāya, of the first Tamil Academy, says that the Sēra prince, Perum-sōrru Udiyan Sēralādan fed both the warring forces of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas in the Mahābhārata war and earned his title, Perum-sōrru Udiyan, the Prince who undertook the great task of feeding

Translations of the *Mahābhārata* had also been many Many were translated under royal patronage, the patronage of the Pandiyas and the Chōlas, but they are not available A post-sangham poet is always hailed as Perundēvanār who wrote the *Bharata*, his work is also lost. Another poet of the same name, contemporary with Nandivarma Pallava III of Kānci, again wrote the *Bhāratam* in the *venbā* metre, it should have been quite a large work, but only a fragment of 800 verses is available It is written in prose and verse, its prose being the earliest example of Tamil prose, excepting *Iraiyanār kalaviyal urai* Its verses are of

high poetic quality and the loss of the major part of it is indeed a great loss to Tamil literature Another poet by name Arulnilai Visāka wrote the *Bhāratam* in Tamil under the Chōla patronage in the 13th century, it is also lost

Villiputtūrar wrote the *Bhāratam* again in the 14th century in over 4300 verses in the *viruttam* metre, his verses are mostly in *chandam*, in a rhythmic lilting type of verse His book was so popular that he was hailed as Villiputtūr *ālvār* His is not a complete work, he stops with the tenth *parva* (or canto) His delineation of the story is merely an abridged version, he does not translate the entire original Many centuries later, two versifiers felt that Villi had condensed the *Vyāsa Bhārata* too much and had also left it incomplete. So they added thousands of verses to the text making it about 16,000 verses, and it is now called the *Nallāp-pillai Bhāratam* after one of them Its poetic value is not much Some others also in later days tried their hand at telling the *Bhārata* story, but all of them are very poor in performance

Subrahmanya Bhārati took a scene from the epic, the *Vow of Draupati*, and elaborated it into more than 300 verses of modern poetry It is superbly lyrical and exquisitely dramatic, and portrays the spirit of modern India's struggle for freedom from the British yoke, it is just one scene and nothing more.

The *Rāmāyana* of Kambai and the *Bhāratam* of Villiputtūrar are not religious books, they are conceived and written as secular literature, although the stories are about the incarnations of Viṣṇu.

Though the books are entirely divergent in poetic quality, they are quite popular among all sections of readers

BHAGAVATA

The *Bhāgavata*, the story of Lord Krisna, is not so There are two versions of the *Bhāgavata*, written by two writers, Sevvaic-Cūduvār and Aruḷāladāsar both of the 16th century, running to 4973 and 9147 verses respectively They were written as religious *purānas* and their poetic merit is not much At a time when *purānas* were immensely popular in Śaivism, these seem to have been written to propagate the Vaisnava cult Incidentally they mention all the stories and legends connected with Visnu including His other nine incarnations In this respect, these are a valuable mine of stories and legends of the Sanskrit literature rendered into the Tamil language in metric form They will continue to serve as encyclopædias in this field for years to come

KANDA PURANA

Kanda purāna of Kacciyappa Sivācārya, written two centuries earlier than these two, belongs also to the same category It is also religious *purānic* literature, extolling the exploits of Skanda, Lord Muruga, and is the only Śaiva epic type *purāna* of the class of the two *Bhāgavatas* It has 10345 verses in six books and has wielded and continues to wield a tremendous influence on the Śaiva people The *Bhāgavatas* were naturally modelled on this The *Kanda purāna* was written at a time when the Śaiva Siddhānta had been systematised as a regular independent school of philosophy and so it contains expositions of the system in the course of

the narration of its story In places, it is good poetry and often it is verse of a very high order A century later than the *Bhagavatas*, *Kanda purāna* was abridged into a 1000 verses by one Sambandha Caranālaya, and this book also is quite popular with the Śaivas.

ETHICAL LITERATURE

Writers in the Tamil language, as in all the Indian languages ancient and modern, have been laying great emphasis on an ethical way of living, we have a rich crop of such literature from the ancient past down to the present century The first and the greatest work in the field of ethical poetry is of course *Kural*. This has been dealt with in a separate chapter.

It had been the source of inspiration for similar ethical writing and a large number of minor books, large and small, came to be written after it But the genius of Tiruvalluvar was such that no one dared to attempt his short verse form, the *kural venbā* metre . all later writers adopted the traditional and the slightly longer *venbā* metre, which had four lines

Though this is not the place to mention it, a word about the *Jñānakkural* may be said here Much later in point of time (12 centuries later), an Avvai wrote a short *kural* poem of 310 verses on the subject of *jñāna* or the path of release, it is a philosophical and yogic treatise But since it is well known that Tiruvalluvar wrote only on the first three goals of life, *aram*, *porul*, and *inbam*, a literary convention had risen that Avvai's book, dealing with the fourth goal namely *vīdu* (liberation), formed a complement to *Kural*, the legend that Avvai was an elder sister of

Tiruvalluvar has added weight to this tradition But it is far from being a fact Many separate treatises, large and small, have immediately followed in the wake of *Kural*

NALADI

Among the group of the eighteen minor poems, the *Kīlk-kanakku*, are found eleven poems which are ethical and didactic in content The main feature of these poems is that they were all sung in the *venbā* metre (except *Mudumolikkhānji* which is in the *āsiriyam*) The foremost among the group is *Kural* Chief among the others is *Naladi nānūru*, the four hundred quartrains The suffix *ār* in the popular name of the work, *Nāladiyār*, indicates the esteem in which it was held among the learned The book is considered a joint production of many Jain monks and there seems to be considerable truth in the statement that it was salvaged from the river Vaigai, when these verses alone proved their literary worth in the religious disputation between the Saiva Saint Jñāna Sambandha and the Jains The reference to Muttaraiyar in two verses in *Naladi* places the book in the middle of the seventh century and makes it no doubt contemporaneous with Jñāna Sambandha The poems were collected together by Padumanār, many centuries later, and arranged into chapters on the model of *Kural* There is not much continuity of thought or unity of the subject in the chapters, this is but natural, since they were merely an artificial later arrangement of isolated ethical writing *Nāladi* makes no mention of God. It is entirely puritanic in nature and a strong vein of asceticism runs through the entire

poem, as against the fulness and abundance, and the felicitous harmony of home life, extolled in *Kural*. Several verses in it are indeed of good poetic quality but it is generally thrown into the shade only by the predominant beauty and elegance, baffling crispness and powerful vigour of *Kural*

Kural speaks of a positive joy and an enjoyment of life, while Nāladi preaches a negation of life. Hence in any scheme of things which glorifies living, it cannot but take a subordinate position

PALAMOLI

Palamoli nānūru is modelled on *Naladi* both in its poetic diction and its subject content Munrurai Araiyar its author was a Jain In the last line of each of its four hundred verses, he has placed a short, crisp and telling proverb which has currency in popular usage even today The proverb generally epitomizes the thought expressed in the other three lines of the verse Though the inclusion of a proverb has imposed an additional stress on the versification of the poet, he has succeeded to a certain extent in evolving a tolerable amount of good poetry The book is naturally a mine of purānic anecdotes and legends, which illustrate the proverbs.

NANMANIK-KATIGAI

Nānmanik-katigai is a shorter work of 103 verses, perhaps earlier in point of time than the two previous books Its name suggests that it is a necklace of four gems strung together it also signifies that each of its verses contains four statements The poem is of considerable poetic merit, superior to *Palamoḷi*, it had

given rise to several similar works which we shall notice further on Many of its statements have passed into the folk-lore of the Tamils, such had been its great force and vitality From a quotation in a *venbā* at the end of *Silappadhikāram* (chapter 20), it may be argued that *Nānmanik-katigai* is earlier than the epic, but since it is held that *Silappadhikāra venbās* are later additions, this point is not tenable

THE OTHERS

Tirikadukam, Sirupanca mūlam and *Ēlādi* along with *Innā nārpatu* and *Iniya nārpatu*, are also ethical poems modelled on *Nānmani* The first three profess to make three, five and six statements respectively in each *venbā*, *Tirikadukam* makes some good poetry but the other two display much of artificial strain Unlike *Nānmani*, whose name suggests gems, the names of these three suggest three, five and six medical ingredients or herbs, the idea is that just as these ingredients help to keep the body healthy and to cure ailments, the thoughts in these books help man to have a healthy and ethical behaviour in life Each of these poems evidently had been planned as one of a hundred verses which the first two now have, but *Ēlādi* has only 80 verses now.

Innā nārpatu and *Iniya nārpatu*, as their names indicate, contain 40 verses each, each verse having bitter truths and sweet truths mentioned in their respective verses The first makes four statements in each verse *Iniya* however has four statements upto its fifth verse and then has only three All the statements are wise observations on life, many of them

tersely and arrestingly told Along with two other poems *Kār nārpatu* and *Kalavali nārpatu*, the four together are known as the *Four Forties*

Two other books in the *18 Kilk-kanakku* group are didactic in character - *Mudumolik - kāñji* and *Ācārak-kōvai* The first book contains so to say ten verses, where each verse is of ten lines again, each line mentioning a particular kind of truth or observation on life The ten verses deal with things superior, which can be known, things which are not to be ridiculed, which will not prosper, which are not what they profess to be, are the worst, are false, are easy, are poor and are never ignored Each thought is expressed in a single line of four feet, having an internal rhyme and alliteration and as such it easily arrests the imagination Each line in the verse has the same ending The poem has inspired later similar works such as *Konrai vēndan* and *Verri-vērkai* in distant centuries.

Ācārak-kōvai strikes a different note It lays down a semi-spiritual course, which disciplines the individual and teaches him good manners and good conduct in life. It is also a poem of a hundred *venbās* but its *venbās* are often of three lines and occasionally more than four also Its concern is the good behaviour of the individual in the home and in society, and also hygiene and sanitation in society Scholars have sought to establish that the author had taken his ideas from the *smritis* ,[1] this is not correct *Āgamas* existed long before the *smritis*, the *Upanisads* and the *Āgamas* are two branches from the same stem, the Vēdas Many of the thoughts of the *Ācārak-kōvai* on hygiene and good manners are no doubt reminiscent

of the *Āgamic* thought. Most of the thoughts of the poem have full relevance even today, after twelve centuries of its writing

AVVAI

With *Ācārak-kovai*, we take leave of the ethical elements of the *Kīlk-kanakku* and now skip through the later centuries The most popular and prolific writer of ethical maxims is Avvai, the most revered and loved poetess of the 12th century Her *Āttisūdi* and *Konrai vēndan* state the eternal truths and the perennial wisdom of ages in the most cryptic language. They are so simple and real, so artistic and homely, that almost all the lines have passed into the folklore of the Tamil people *Āttisūdi* consists of 108 short lines, arranged in the alphabetical order, each line having only two feet Here the author lists all rules for an upright and useful life in society. Often she summarises in one line or two words, what *Kural* says in one couplet *Konrai-vēndan* belongs to the same order, of 91 single lines of four feet each, having a melodious internal rhyme. Though crisp, the lines have a superior poetic quality in them Though they remind us of *Mudumolik-kānji*, they are freer and happier, because here there is no monotony of the need to conform to a central theme Each line is a jewel, well cut and polished and set.

Equally popular are two other poems of Avvai, *Mūdurai* and *Nalvali*, of 30 and 40 *venbās* each, they are, in general, observations on life and speak of moral truths, instructive for the young and the old alike; the first is more general in content, while the second lays greater emphasis on *karmā* and spiritual

matters The two poems serve as introductions to the study of poetry by the young in the primary standards of our schools

OTHERS IN VENBA

It is remarkable that the *venbā* metre has been chosen as the best form for moral instruction verses, throughout all the centuries beginning even from *Kural* Right up to the 19th century we find almost all didactic and ethical literature written in this metre. *Araneric-cāram*, the longest poem of this type after the three *Kilk-kanakku* works *Kural*, *Nāladi* and *Palamoli*, was written in the 13th century by a Jain author. It has 226 venbās and some of them are in simple and telling language, dealing with ethics of a general nature Prince Ativīrarāma Pandiya wrote his *Naruntohai* (other wise known as *Verri-vērkai*), as short aphorisms on the model of Avvai's *Konrai-vēndan*. Kumara gurupara swami wrote his *Nītineri viḷakkam* in 100 verses epitomizing some of the thoughts in *Kural* *Nanneri* of Swami Sivaprakasa is a shorter poem of 40 verses A wave of ethical writing seems to have surged though the centuries and these two books are the best specimen of the writing of the politically uncertain period, between the downfall of the Chōlas and the Pāndiyas and the rise of the European power in the south Two other poems of unknown authorship also require mention here *Nīti venbā* and *Nīti sāram* have each 100 verses The former tries to imitate the earlier classical writing, depicting observations on life with a well known imagery, while the latter is in the *viruttam* metre, and is mere verse, without any claim to poetry But yet the two had been popular even with the uneducated people in the last century.

Vivēka cintāmani, a collection of more than one hundred verses of a didactic nature is a very late anthology of stray verses, containing some forceful observations of worldly wisdom, it however contains many statements decrying woman, it is more a jumble than a systematic collection Again, *Nīti nūl* by Munsif Vēdanāyakam Pillai is a similar ambitious composition on moral instruction, very clever but not poetic *New Āttisūdi* of the national poet Bhārati is a short work on the lines of Avvai's poem, written with the stinging patriotism of a revolutionary fighter.

SATAKAM and KURAL VENBA

Two other types of poems may be mentioned here The *Śatakam* poems of which we have more than a score are small pieces of 100 verses each, generally in the very long *viruttam* metre, with a refrain praising some local deity in the second half of the last line, and containing in the other lines observations on life and living. They have had immense popularity till the first quarter of the 20th century Till recently young children knew them by rote, they served as an introduction to poetry and literature to the young mind Though the verses were long, they were adapted to singing and so were easy to memorize They also helped to keep alive many social traditions and conventions in the minds of successive generations, because a memorization of at least half a dozen *satakams* was considered necessary for a beginner in literature.

The other type is the *Kural venbā* poem, each verse of which sought to illustrate a *Kural*, reproduced in its last two lines, with incidents taken from the

purānās and the popular legends and stories and narrated in the first two lines There are many such poems but they are all extremely laboured writing and they have never had any popularity, except to the extent that they strove to popularise *Kural*. Such a poem has also exercised a Gandhian mind Rāya Cokkalingam, a Gandhian and a respected scholar of the 20th century, has written such a poem where the first two lines are addressed to Tiruvalluvar himself, who supplies his answer in the next two lines taken from his own *Kural* [2]

Public morals and private, being what they are, pointing to a downward trend, good souls will continue to go on with their preaching for a clean and honest way of life

Ethical writers had always concerned themselves with the impermanence of this life, of its youth and riches, and had enjoined man to lead a life of righteousness and love In the depth and soundness of wisdom, in crispness and arresting expression, in the love of man and the eagerness to serve him, none can equal *Kural* and Avvai's two single line works There is nothing more to be said and no one can say it better than these but, mankind being what it is, poets will go on repeating the same truths and observations again and again to the end of time.

CONCEPT OF ETHICS

A few words may be said about the concept of ethics in general in the early periods of Tamil literature which we are discussing here The goal of life is four-fold - *aṟam*, *poruḷ*, *inbam* and *vīḍu* (*dharma*, *artha*,

kāma and *mōksa* in Sanskrit), meaning virtue or righteousness, prosperity or objectives of existence, happiness and final liberation Of these we have seen that *Kural* has laid its emphasis on the first three, implying that final liberation and the bliss resulting therefrom, will naturally accrue through a rightful fulfilment of the first three It is not correct to say that, as some seem to hold, the impact of Jainism and Buddhism on Tamilian society in the early centuries was partially responsible for the awakening of the ethical consciousness Viewed from the Brahministic point of view, it may perhaps be argued with a certain amount of truth, that these two religions were reformist in character and had helped to do away with the animal sacrifices in the vedic religious practice It is not so true with regard to the indigenous Tamilian society and religion A mere perusal of *Pura nānūru* and *Kural* will indicate that the ethical truths propounded therein are all of a native character and have no element of borrowing or adaptation The insistence on the qualities of valour and chivalry, and the adoration and high status given to women in general, are enough to disprove any theories of borrowing There is no space here to dilate on this subject

The foundation of Tamilian ethics was a universal brotherhood of the human species, irrespective of clan or clime and a purity of the individual, physical and spiritual, this included purity in thought, word and deed.

Anger, lust, untruth and greed stand condemned Though the real ascetic life is held in great reverence,

the householder's life is greatly extolled, because it is the foundation for all social living Man and woman, leading a happy life together, helping others, particularly the ascetics, and begetting children, is said to be the ideal life. However, a righteous conduct for both, not because of the fear of sin, but for its own sake, the spirit of giving to the needy irrespective of whoever it may be, are the most praised virtues The dignity of labour is always emphasized Friendship, avoidance of bad company, filial duty, respect to elders, kindness to the meek and a general cultured and generous behaviour make for a respectable man. Ignorance, illiteracy, meat-eating, greed, and intolerance stand condemned The limitations of birth are overcome by one's own effort, conduct, sense of justice and achievement Although the transcience of life, youth and riches have been preached by many, the core of the general ethical teaching is not the negation of life, but the enjoyment thereof for nobler and righteouspurposes Allegiance to the one Higher Transcending Power is emphasized by all.

Thus the general trend of the ethical code laid down by the ancient books may be seen to be of a universal character, and applicable also to the modern times.

References

1 S Vaiyapuri Pillai, *Ilakkiya manimalai* 1954, pages 101-6

2. *Gandhik-kavitai*, 1969 Section 2, Gandhiyum Valluvarum

DEVOTIONAL POETRY

Philosophy runs in the veins of the Indian, and more so of the Tamilian No wonder therefore that we find a supplication to the Supreme Being made by poets from the earliest known period of literary production. In the absence of positive evidence, the modern scientific mind may not believe that that Being, in the name of Iraiyanār, presided over the three Tamil Universities Among the available literary material, *Tiru Murugārruppadai* is the earliest poem in praise of a deity, here Muruga the Lord of the hills Whether the poem was devotional poetry is no longer a question now, because there are thousands of devotees reciting it today before Muruga in the temples But devotional poetry has always in it the element of music or singing, not merely reciting , this can be seen in the songs in praise of Muruga and Tirumāl (Visnu) in *Paripādal*, where the name of the poet, the name of the tune, and the name of the music master who wrote the notation therefor are given. *Silappadhikāram* contains many musical pieces in praise of Muruga, Visnu, and Śakti as Korravai Not only music but simplicity and easy understandability are the keynotes of any devotional poetry; all these elements are lacking in *Tiru Murugāṛruppadai*

EARLY POETRY

Tiru Murugārruppadai sings the glory of Muruga and His camps or shrines and the divine grace that He

bestows on His devotees, though the verse is terse and difficult, yet there is an element of directness and straightforward narration which could not be found in later devotional poetry *Paripādal* contains some very lofty and sublime thoughts, which are still a wonder to find in the poems of those ancient days. Kaduvan Iḷa-Eyinanār who has sung on both Muruga and Tirumāl, sings on Muruga 'My Lord Muruga, decked with the *kadamba* flowers, we crave of you, not riches or gold, nor the pleasures of life, but three things else – bestow on us Your Grace to lead us on to final release, grant us devotion to you, and the righteous conduct that accrues from both'[1] This concept, namely the one of beseeching God to grant not material welfare, but His Grace and liberation from births, has been the only prayer of all devotional outpourings of all the saints and poets, Śaiva or Vaisnava, in the entire range of later literature, from the sangham age to this day

THE FIRST SAINTS

The centuries 3 to 6 saw the evolution of the first Saints in both Śaivism and Vaisnavism, who sang devotional hymns which have been collected into the canons of the respective systems *Tirumantiram* of Tirumūlar and the songs of Karaikkāl Ammai in Śaivism, and the three *Antādis* of the first three Ālvārs, Poyhai, Bhūtam and Pēy in Vaisnavism, belong to this period Tirumūlar's book is more in the nature of an esoteric philosophy than of prayer, while all the others are real ecstatic outpourings of a god-soaked heart. Even today, after a thousand and five hundred years after they were written, they move us to tears

of joy and give us comfort and solace, and raise us to ethereal heights of peaceful bliss All of these are written in simple language without any involved or complex imagery or construction These saints generally never stop to criticise other sects, they are content with the joy which the thought of their Lord evokes in their hearts, their heart is so full that there is no room there for cold reasoning or for criticism The devotion of these saints was one of total surrender and self-effacement, like the wonder of an innocent child at an immediate experience We do not know even the natural names of these three Vaisnava saints and even Tirumūlar, and Ammai, though her name was Punitavati, came to be called only as Ammai, the Mother

THE NAYANMARS

We are now entering into the most creative period in both the religions from the point of view of devotional literature All the Vaisnava saints and all the Śaiva saints, except those mentioned before had lived in the period from 600 to 900 A D The lives of the Śaiva Saints and the Vaisnava Ālvārs are well known in the land to require any detailed account in this short survey Jñāna sambandha of Śikali, Appar of Tiru Āmūr and Sundara of Tiru Nāvalūr toured the length and breadth of the Tamil country and visited all the Śiva shrines and so stirred up the religious fervour of the people, as had not been done in any other period, before or after, in Tamil literary or religious history Their impact on the people was all round Temple building activity commenced on a vast scale; literary output assumed newer dimensions, music

had a new lease of life, religion and philosophy came alive into the lives of the people at all levels All branches of the fine arts were activated afresh A new ethical and spiritual code seemed to have been laid down to govern public morals Society came closer to an almost classless religious integration Mānikkavācaka and the lesser canon writers complete the list of the Śaiva hymnologists The hymns have been dealt with separately

THE ALVARS

The Vaisnava canon, both in substance and in time, runs parallel to the Śaiva The Ālvārs are twelve and their songs number about 4000 They have moulded, more than the Śaiva canon has done, the life and ambitions of the Vaisnava people in the land, more particularly the Sri Vaisnava brahmins Rāmānuja by about 1100 A D and Vēdānta Dēśika by about 1300 A D had breathed new life into that community so much so that the lives of very large sections of that society are bound up with the temples and temple rituals In most cases, the Vaisnava canon had invaded the home, and even all domestic and social rituals are performed to the accompaniment of the songs Such an intensive fusion had not been effected by the Śaivas who had remained more austere and less emotional

THE OTHERS

The culmination of the Śaiva canon is the *Periya purānam*, the metric biography of the Śaiva saints written under Chōla patronage It is a string of stories of the highest devotion to Śiva and the book itself is a

work of absolute devotion and surrender to God, unequalled in the whole range of Tamil Literature The dotting of the Tamil country with hundreds of gigantic temples in granite – a feature not known anywhere else in India and in the whole world too, – is due to the impact of the devotional songs of Śaivism and the *Periya purānam* on society People named their children, boys and girls after some happy expressions in the canonical songs.[2] Scanning through the centuries we find a rich legacy of devotional songs handed down to us age after age *Vināyakar ahaval* by Avvai of the 14th century is widely memorised even today. It is closely followed by the three *Karuvai antādi* poems of a Pāndiya prince, one of which is also known as the *Kutti* (or minor) *Tiruvācakam*, *Porūr Sannidhi murai* of Cidambara swami and *Kandar kalivenbā* of Kumara gurupara Among the Vaisnavas the most marvellous piece is *Satakōpar antādi* (12th century) In praise of Nammālvār, it contains some very elegant and beautiful verses, the poem is also a rare challenge to Sanskrit, which the real Vaisnava would fain relegate to the background in preference to Nammālvār's Tamil This is a very unusual position, and it speaks volumes for the Vaisnava's love of Nammālvār.

ARUNAGIRI NATHA

The greatest figures in later devotional literature are three – Arunagiri nātha, Tāyumānavar and Rāma-ḷinga, and they are also immensely popular to this day There are groups, among the elite and among the unlettered, which are moved to ecstasy by the songs of these masters, as by no one else,[3] Arunagiri nātha

needs no introduction to any Tamil group in India or abroad His *Tiruppuhal*, is the most widely known of his compositions There is such a revelry in metre, in *chandam*, in rhythm, and even in the ecstasy of the subject matter, that he will live in the hearts of man as long as the language lives The variety of his rhythmic pattern is unequalled and very vast. Condemnation of the lure of woman occupies a large part of his songs no doubt, but yet his religious zeal and supplication to God, and the joy and peace emanating from the songs, far outdo that element. Sanskrit words vie with Tamil in coming to his aid for the expression of ideas and for setting forth the rhythmic pattern and he is a great master in judiciously using both to create the lilting effect that is the mark of his *Tiruppuhal* To him Muruga is the Supreme God who dwells in all the temples and who comes to the succour of his devotee at all times 'The singer of the *Tiruppuhal* shows no reverence to the others' has become a proverb He has perpetuated the legend, incorrect perhaps, that Sambandha is an incarnation of Muruga

Tiruppuhal by its variety of rhythm, movement and magic of word pattern, and immensity of volume, has eclipsed his other works, but they also deserve equal attention if not more His *Tiru vahuppu* numbers about 25 long songs equalling *Tiruppuhal* in rank. *Kandar anubhūti*, a short poem of 51 short quatrains is the essence of his mystic experience

But his *Kandar alankāram*, in 106 verses, is a much simpler poem, breathing courage and hope to all mortals. The faith in God voiced here will make even

the most despondent go through life bravely, and confidently meet any challenge in life There is no poem in the language which will infuse faith and courage in young children as firmly as *Kandar alankāram* It is mostly in very simple language and many of its verses laugh at Death These two smaller poems are as popular as *Tiruppuhal* itself

By about the days of Arunagiri lived many Siddhas who had also poured forth their thoughts in their stirring songs, but these are expressions of their esoteric philosophy, where the element of outward devotion is absent

TAYUMANAVAR

Tāyumānavar on the other hand hails in the tradition of the Śaiva Nāyanmārs, the authors of *Dēvāram* and *Tiruvācakam* He lived a thousand years after them His is a mature and sober mind which sees God in everything around and hesitates even to pluck a flower for worship, because it sees God in the flower He unwaveringly preaches the modern one-world concept, that mankind is one, philosophies and God are one He is a well read man, a profound scholar, he was a minister under the Nāyaks but renounced that life But he has no use for scholarship and higher philosophy in his scheme of the values of life, in his preparation therefor, and in the struggle to attain his goal of a universal vision and oneness with the all-pervasive One He has no use for the body and the pleasures of the senses but he does not heap abuses on them, as many others had done He always offers his mind as the sacrifice, at the altar of the temple the heart, his love as the holy

bathing water, his spirit is the food *neivēdya*, his intellect the incense and lamp, the deity is the God of Peace He always seeks to effect an external harmony of the various sects like the Vēdānta, the Siddhanta and the Siddha, as well as an internal harmony of love to God and to all creation He preaches also a philosophy of compassion; he enjoins man to look on every being as God Himself and give it the love he would give to God Tāyumānavar was a great master in the use of Sanskrit, and although he uses a large volume of Sanskrit words occasionally, the use is not oppressive, there is force and vigour, and a directness, simplicity and aptness which make us forget the language and melt in their meaning Tāyumānavar preaches a higher philosophy, which soars higher than rituals and temple worship, and he will have the greatest appeal for the thinking mind, be it unlettered or highly learned, for all time

No Vaisnava poet of later days has risen to the stature of Arunagiri or Tāyumānavar

RAMALINGA

Rāmalinga, coming a little more than a hundred years after Tāyumānavar, holds up the banner of compassion and has given his life to that philosophy In the long history of devotion among the Śaiva fold which includes such illustrious names as Appar, Mānikka vacakar, Arunagirinatha and Tāyumānavar, Rāmalinga does have a place, but he does not follow in the footsteps of the first three but follows in the footsteps of Tāyumānavar His doctrine of compassion and of the good life are the direct legacy of Tāyumānavar His concept of the one-world

embraces within its fold not only mankind but also the animal and the vegetable kingdoms He had seen in his days poverty and hunger all around him and he believed with Gandhi that God appears before the hungry in the shape of bread Among all the god-inspired souls, he is the one who also founded institutions for poor feeding

THE OTHERS

Worship of Śakti, just like the worship of Vināyaka and Kumāra, had been there in Tamilnad, running parallel to the worship of Śiva *Ambikaimālai* of Varagunarama Pandiya and *Abhirāmi Antādi* of Abhirāma Bhattar, in the 16th and the 18th centuries, are moving poems in praise of Śakti, but they are not to be mistaken to be relics of any Śākta cult in the land Vināyaka, Kumāra and Śakti are worshipped as just manifest forms of Śiva and they do not constitute any separate cult

Many persons had written devotional verses even in this century. Pamban swami was a gifted writer who produced a large volume of devotional verses in the first quarter of this century, all of them are on Muruga, he had a large group of followers here. He was fond of writing difficult verses, he was a good versifier Tiru V Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar, the celebrated writer had also written devotional verses on all possible beings – the Hindu pantheon, the Jina, the Buddha, Allah, and Christ, but they stop with being mere verses His love for the one-world concept was great, he has been responsible for indirectly making it a fashion among writers to express homage to sects other than the *vaidika*

So the cry of the devoted heart goes on. It is echoed in our own day in the variety of songs by the national poet Bhārati, in whose songs we find the inspiration of the hymnists and Arunagiri, of the Siddhas, of Tāyumānavar and Rāmalinga It will continue to be heard, in spite of any amount of ungodly trends, to the end of time

Notes and References

1 *Paripadal* 5

2 *Vide* such proper names found in inscriptions, as *Tarunendu sekharan* (from Appar), *Sirudaikkalal* (from Sundarar), *Nirani pavalakkunram*, *Malalai silambu* and *Edutta padam* (from Tiruvisaippa) and *Maruta manikkam* (from Pattinattar)

3. The singing of *Tiruppuhal mani* (the term of endearment by which was known T M Krishnaswami Aiyar, a senior and prominent member of the Madras Bar and the Chief Justice of the High Court of a South Indian state for some time), will be fresh for ever in the ears of those who had the good fortune to participate in his *bhajans* at the Vadapalani Subrahmanya temple near Madras, just a quarter of a century ago All classes of the people, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, cultured and illiterate, were moved to raptures over his singing, and rare indeed was the person who did not dance at his *bhajans*

THE COMMENTARIES

Commentary writing constitutes an important feature in the growth of Tamil Literature The 10th to the 15th centuries may be seen to be the most productive periods in this field Commentaries have been written both on literary works and on grammatical treatises The largest number of writers have written commentaries or annotations on *Tirukkural* among the literary works, and on *Tolkāppiyam* among the grammatical works, in both the types, the commentaries on these two have been the earliest

KALAVIYAL URAI

Iraiyanār Kalaviyal is an exception to the last statement A legend says that Lord Sōmasundara, i e , Śiva enshrined in the temple at Madurai, sympathized with the desire of the Pāndiya prince there about the need for a grammatical treatise on the subject of *porul* and so caused *Iraiyanār Kalaviyal*, a book of 60 aphorisms on the subject to be found under His seat in the temple One Nakkīrar (not the sangham poet) had written an elaborate gloss on it and this has been hailed ever since as a model of excellent prose writing Probably the text and the gloss were composed in the 8th century A D and, after two centuries of oral transmission, were reduced to writing This gloss is the earliest specimen of prose writing we have, it is even more valuable than the text. We get a legendary account of the earlier

sanghams which existed at the submerged South Madurai and Kapātapuram, only from this commentary, this account was later incorporated by Adiyārkku nallār in his commentary on *Silappadhikāram* The *Kalaviyal* commentary is in a very rich and picturesque language, mostly a form of poetic prose, full of alliteration, assonance and rhyme, in long drawn out sentences But yet it is very dramatic, studded with similes and metaphors, yet direct, full of grace, clear and lucid though complex, very descriptive and ornamental It is no doubt good reading, although it is a laboured and ornate writing An unwholesome outcome thereof was that most of the early Tamil scholars of the end of the 19th century and the first quarter of this century imagined that that was the ideal prose style and tried to imitate it, with the result that all their writing resulted in a stilted, highly artificial, pedantic and unreadable language

VALUE OF THE COMMENTARIES

The greatest contribution of the commentators as a whole is that they helped to preserve many a work, be it grammar or pure literature, from extinction But for their attempts to elucidate the texts, the texts themselves might have passed into oblivion long ago This will be very clear from even a casual glance at the list of the large volume of the literature quoted by them They mention many pieces of literature which had been irretrievably lost before them And we know today that quite a large body of literature which was available in their day has since been lost Besides, they have preserved the literary and social traditions and conventions, customs

and ideals, idioms, words and their significance, of a period a thousand years ago, and had re-captured in their writing the atmosphere of those even a further thousand years earlier, and have handed them down to us Thus in a broad sense they have helped to maintain the continuity of the language and its literature But for their zeal and their reverence for the earlier literature, we would have been left with only the *purānās* and the *prabandhas* of the last five centuries , the earlier literature – *Ettuttohai, Pattuppāttu, Silappadhikāram* etc – would have perished, as similar other early works had perished

TOLKAPPIYA URAI

Commentaries by Ilampūranar and Naccinārkkiniyar are available in full[1] for the three books of *Tolkāppiyam* , that of Pērāsiriyar for only the end part of Book Three Six commentaries have been written on the second book dealing with words and etymology [2] Of all the commentaries, that of Ilampūranar is the simplest He deserves to be called the Discoverer of *Tolkāppiyam* , because when *Tolkāppiyam* had become obscure through suppression by Kalabhra rule at Madura, necessitating a new grammar by name *Iraiyanār Kalaviyal* to be composed, Ilampūranar, a few centuries later, discovered *Tolkāppiyam*, studied it and expounded it with great pains and gave it a new lease of life Naccinārkkiniyar's commentary is the most elaborate and scholarly, but heavily weighted with citations from early literature and with his own idiosyncrasies The commentary by Sēnāvaraiyar on the second book is considered to be the most original and the best on that book

GRAMMAR

We shall take up the commentaries on the grammatical treatises first We have noticed the one on *Iraiyanār Kalaviyal* This was probably reduced to writing by Nīlakantanār in the 10th century *Yappa-runkala virutti* and its *Kārikai urai*, each by a different disciple of the author Amita sagara, deal elaborately with prosody, the subject matter of the texts *Yāppa-runkala virutti* gives as references and citations a list of authors and their works, which seems to be limitless and inexhaustible We learn from it that not only many poems large and small were in existence before the 10th century, but that there were at least half a dozen schools of grammar and prosody which had evolved their own separate rules for verse-making, we do not hear of them anywhere else in literary history To give an instance, there was one *Avinayam* by Avinayanār, which was obviously of a different school of thinking from *Tolkāppiyam*, and for which we learn a celebrated author, Raja pavitrap–pallavataraiyar[3] had also written a commentary Both the text and the commentary are of course lost We also get a glimpse of the literary trends in the 8th – 10th centuries, when there were writers who had assumed the names like Agastya, Tolkāppiya and Nakkīra and that perhaps jealousies among them had caused many books to fall into disuse and later pass into oblivion Gloss writing on grammatical treatises goes on to the end of the 15th century, *Tolkāppiyam*, *Purap porul venbāmālai*, *Neminātam*, and *Nannūl* are the chief books on which gloss was written The work continues in later centuries also. We also find some authors like *Nārkavirāja nambi* and some writers in later days writing the commentary for their own works.

KURAL URAI

If commentaries on grammatical works bring to us obsolete and unfamiliar principles of language, etymology and poetics, those on literary works are equally important in giving us a peep into the life and culture, ideals and aspirations, pleasures and sorrows of the Tamil people of bygone ages The many attempts[4] at expounding the thoughts of *Kural* beginning from the simple writing of Manakkudavar culminate in the elaborate and classic commentary of Parimēlalakar Though a few of his thoughts appear today unacceptable to some, there is no other writing which has brought out the glory and splendour of the classic of Tiruvalluvar as well as he has done

ADIYARKKU NALLAR

A work of even greater importance to the very concept of Mut-Tamil is the commentary of Adiyārkku nallār on *Silappadhikāram* The classification as Mut-Tamil has been dealt with in an earlier chapter *Silappadhikāram* is the only Tamil work which deals with the three divisions of Tamil, *Iyal*, *Isai* and *Nātakam* (literary composition, musical composition and drama), and Adiyārkku nallār, following in the footsteps of the earlier glossary writer,[5] reveals to us a glorious vista of an earlier period when the two divisions of Tamil, music and drama, flourished in all their splendour, they had a vast literature, and many manuals laid down the rules for the musicians and the instruments, for the dance, drama and acting But for the casual illustrations provided by him, posterity could never have known the wide extent and the deep emotional content of this vast body of literature Nallār also gives the story of the first two sanghams in full.

NACCINARKKINIYAR

But the greatest writer of commentaries and the most voluminous writer is Naccinārkkiniyar He has annotated *Tolkāppiyam* in its entirety,[6] and has also annotated the whole of *Pattup-pāttu*, *Kalit-tohai* and *Cintāmani*[7] As one who has tackled both general literature and grammar, he was a master with no equal, and in the volume of citations which he gives he is unrivalled Naccinārkkiniyar along with Adiyārkku nallār is remarkable for the pains he takes to give posterity a peep into the past, into the literature and life of the past, most of which had become extinct

Naccinārkkiniyar seems to have been a living encyclopædia of language and literature in his day Like all the great gloss writers, he also had great reverence for the writers of the texts It was the religion of the commentators not to let down the authors, this we find in a large measure in his gloss on *Cintāmani*. The discerning reader will find that but for his gloss, the book least deserves the acclaim it has had, Naccinārkkiniyar has corrected the author in several places Besides grammar and general literature, he was equally familiar with other writing such as astrology, botany, zoology and medicine

THE OTHERS

A word may be said about the unique commentary on *Tiruk-kōvaiyār* by one Perāsiriyar,[8] who is different from the *Tolkāppiyam* commentator This writer gives a very useful commentary, considering the *kōvai* as a work on the *aham* theme on the model of the sangham poetry The uniqueness of the commentary lies in the

fact that of all the *Tirumurais* in the Śaiva canon, only this poem of 400 verses, said to be part of the eighth canon, has earned a commentary

All the sangham poems have commentaries of varying merit; the *18 Kīlk-kanakku* also have been written on, some commentaries are very valuable while some others are not so [9]

There have been many lesser lights in this field and, often we find in later days, many *purānās* and similar writing always annotated, as an instance may be mentioned *Sivadharmōttaram* and *Arunācala Purānam*, all of whose manuscripts exist as text and commentary. These had acquired a religious importance which necessitated their simplification in prose for the understanding of the masses and hence their annotation.

A few words on the *manipravāla* commentaries are mentioned in the chapter on Vaisnava literature.

Notes and References

1 The commentary of Naccinarkkiniyar for three chapters of Book 3 *(meyppadu, uvamam* and *marapu iyal)* are not available

2 Six commentaries on the second book of Tolkappiyam have been printed, only two for Books one and three

3 *Vide Nannul*, commentary by Mayilai nathar

4 Ten commentaries are said to have been written on *Kural*, five have been printed *vide Tirukkural Uraikkottu* edition published under the auspices of the Kaṣi Mutt, Tiruppanandaḷ,

5. The glossary and Adiyarkku nallar's commentary have been beautifully edited and published by Dr Swaminatha Ayyar, 1892, third edition 1927 The name of the gloss writer is not known

6 Though his commentary on three of the concluding sections of the third Book of *Tolkappiyam* are not available, that of Perasiriyar for this portion is available

7 The world of Tamil students should certainly feel grateful to Naccinarkkiniyar for this commentary but for which *Cintamani* would not only be obscure, but would also appear to be a poor composition

8 *Vide* the edition published under the auspices of the Kasi Mutt, Tiruppanandal, 1960, which gives an earlier gloss and Perasiriyar's commentary

9 For an exhaustive account of these commentaries, *vide* pages 119 - 149 of my History of Tamil Literature, 13th century.

ŚAIVA LITERATURE

DEVOTIONAL WRITING

We deal in this section only with the Śaiva religious literature The Śaiva canon and the other Śaiva devotional poetry have been treated separately During the period of about five centuries during which the ethical books of the *18 Kīlk-kanakku* came to be written, there have been parallel streams of thought which went deeper than mere ethics We have here the beginnings of religious writing, both on Śiva and on Visnu We have noted earlier that the Śaiva and the Vaisnava Canon had their beginning during this period Tirumūlar and Karaikkāl Ammai lived during the centuries 3 to 5 and wrote their songs It has to be noted here that while Ammai is all simple devotion, Tirumūlar's songs are not mere devotion but are all philosophical and mystic writing His book is the only one of the twelve books of the Śaiva canon which is all philosophy and mysticism The four Śaiva Acāryas, who lived during the 7th to the 9th centuries preached the *bhakti* cult, that of love and total surrender to God

Acārak-kōvai, the last of the *18 Kīlk-kanakku*, shows considerable Saiva influence and may be considered to have been composed after the three Śaiva Nāyanmārs had sung their *Dēvaram*.

Nambiyāndār nambi, called the Vyāsa of the Śaiva canon, is important, not only because he collected together the forgotten Śaiva hymns and arranged them into different books, but also because he caused the musical notations to be made for them with the help of a *pāna* girl

These paved the way for temple worship and gradually, when the Chōla emperors held sway over all the Tamil spoken areas, huge magnificent palaces for God in granite known as temples came to be built The period of the Chōla supremacy is one grand epoch of Śiva worship This had attained its zenith by the 11th century, by which time all wars were over and there was relative peace in the land, and there was no more scope for empire expansion, worship and ritual were at their maximum, followed to the level of a satiety, and now thinkers had time to turn their minds towards deeper thoughts The three eternal entities, God, soul and matter, began to engage their attention and in time the Śastras came to be written in Tamil

EARLY SASTRAS

Besides, there might have been the example of the Vaisnava acāryas, Nāthamuni, Ālavandār and Rāmānuja, who wrote innumerable Sanskrit manuals laying down their own systems of philosophy and rituals, during the 9 – 11 centuries Although these were in a minority, the Śaivas could not help being influenced by their dedicated work for their religion

In such an atmosphere, the first philosophical writings of Śaivism are born An important feature of

the Śaiva writings is that they are all in *Tamil*, unlike the Vaisnava writing of the period which was *all* in Sanskrit, are all *original*, and are all also *good poetry*. Unlike many secular writings, all these religious treatises are wholly available and elaborately annotated in the later centuries. There are three outstanding books, all written in the 12th century *Jñānāmirtam* contains 75 verses in the *āsiriyam* metre, dealing with the Śaiva philosophy It is quite a laboured writing, written in a terse and partly archaic language, reminiscent of the sangham age, and its phraseology is also not of the general run of Śaivism. *Tiru Undiyār*, modelled on the poem of the same name forming part of *Tiruvācakam*, is written in a *tālisai* metre of three lines. It is not a regular treatise but is an expression of the author's ecstatic and mystic experience *Tiruk-Kalirrup-padiyār* is a sort of metrical commentary on it in the *venbā* metre, and much larger It mentions besides the thoughts contained in the original, many of the Śaiva legends of the servants of God which were current up to that period These two books are hailed as the first two *Śāstras* of the Śaiva Siddhanta school of philosophy

MEIKANDAR

It was given to Meikandār to collect all the philosophical thought contained in the Śaiva canon and crystallise it into a logical system of philosophy. He wrote this in the form of twelve short aphorisms defining the concept of God, the soul, the bonds and the means for release He had also added a larger metrical illustration and explanation for the text and these together are known as *Śiva jñānabōdham* The

Śaiva philosophy has since come to be known as the Meikanda system Many illustrious spiritual preceptors followed after him. His disciple Aruḷnandi wrote his *Śiva jñāna siddhi*, a very large metrical commentary on *Śiva jñāna bōdham* Its first part of over three hundred verses is a refutation of the doctrines of fourteen alien schools of philosophy, beginning from the *lōkāyata*, and the second part a little longer, is a clear enunciation of the Śaiva point of view. Its verses are couched in beautiful poetic form, and reading it, one may even forget that he is going through an abstract philosophical treatise, but may enjoy it as a piece of pure literature The *Siddhi* is a happy illustration of the statement that poetry lends grace to philosophy and philosophy lends weight to poetry

Arulnandi's disciple's disciple Umāpati wrote many manuals, of which *Śivaprakāśam* and *Tiruvarulpayan*, each of 100 verses, make good reading and introduce the reader to the Śaiva philosophy The works of all these authors, fourteen in number, are together known as the *Siddhānta Śastras* In the years after them, many elaborate glosses have been written on all of them

SAIVA SCHOOLS

Following in the spiritual line of these preceptors, there have been many illustrious writers who had expounded particular aspects of the Śaiva philosophy in their writings. Chief of them are *Tattvap-prakāśa* and *Maraijñāna Sambandha* who had written valuable treatises Other enlightened disciples and seers founded

monasteries or centres of religious study and practice, in places such as Sūryanārkoil, Tiruvāvaduturai, Kancipuram and Dharmapuram, all of which exist today with varying degrees of importance and usefulness These had been responsible for the production of a large volume of sectarian literature during the centuries 16 to 19. Their writing had generally proceeded on four lines They are philosophical and religious treatises, commentaries, *purānas*, and devotional poetry

Many are the philosophical manuals written by the preceptors in all these lines The Saiva pathway to God has been said to be four – the *carya*, *kriya*, *yōga* and *jñāna mārgas* and many books have been written on each of them Sivāgra Yōgi the founder of the mutt at Sūryanārkōil was a great genius who had written large tomes in Sanskrit and in Tamil He wrote *Śivanerip-prakāśa*, a long poem of 215 verses, which explains many obscure points in Śaiva Siddhanta He is the only writer in Śaivism to employ the *manipravāla* style , he has written a *manipravāla* commentary on Arulnandi's *Siddhiyar* He has written many large Sanskrit treatises and all of them are great books in their respective fields Guru Jñāna Sambandha, founder of the Dharmapuram Mutt, has written many minor poems on the Śaiva religion Many works on Śaivism had been written both in this mutt and in the Tiruvāvaduturai mutt in the later centuries The greatest commentary writer of all time is Śivajñāna swami of Tiruvāvaduturai , he wrote two commentaries on the *Śiva jñāna bōdham* , one is the larger *Bhāsya* intended to emulate the *Śankara Bhāsya* on the

Brahma Sūtras, and the other is the shorter gloss Both are valuable works in Śaivism Most of the Siddhānta śāstras had given rise to several good commentaries These are important both as expositions of philosophy and as models of contemporary prose

OTHER POEMS

There has been a conscious attempt at recapturing the language and imagery of the sangham poetry, *Kallādam* reflects this attempt This is a poem of 100 verses, short and long, in the *āsiriyam* metre dealing with some of the *aham* (love poetry) themes of the sangham age The verses are in praise of Śiva at Madurai The book is no doubt a good attempt, but its artificiality makes it a failure The author had collected many an anecdote current in his time and they have helped later writers

Dakka yāgap parani of Ottakkūttar is a major Śaiva poem, though it is modelled like a war song, it really celebrates an exploit of Śiva It is a remarkable poem, unequalled in its sound effect and rhythm, and in the audacious portrayal of the earth and the cosmos, of the human agency, and the world of goblins and ghosts and angels together, on the same canvas.

PURANAS

Śaiva *purānas* have been dealt with elsewhere They have started relatively early in point of time, with *Nambi Tiruvilaiādal*, and go on down to the 20th

century. Many *purānas* have been wholly translated in verse by the Pāndiya princes of the 16th century *Purānas* on local shrines called *sthala purānas* have been written in hundreds, often running to thousands of verses, *Māyūra Purāna* has 6519 verses, while *Tirunelvēli purāna*, perhaps the longest, has over 9,000 verses *Kanda purāna* in Tamil by Kacciyappa Śivācārya was conceived on the model of Kambar's *Rāmāyana* in the epic style

Periya purāna is the Śaiva hagiology, and many other lives of saints have also been written as *purāna*. The *purāna* by Kadavul-mā-muni, depicting the life of Saint Mānikkavācaka is very unique, it is fully and wholly devoted to *bhakti*, without the least description of woman

But the one later *purāna* which had attained the front rank of literature is easily *Tiruvilaiyādal purāna* of Paranjōti There had been Nambi's earlier work on the subject and Paranjōti, singing on the same subject, namely the sports of Śiva at Madurai, barely two hundred and seventy five years ago from now, has achieved such poetic excellence that has called for the admiration of all critics He writes in a simple language, without pomp or ostentation, and goes on with a straight forward narration Occasionally, many philosophical truths of Śaivism are also interwoven into the narrative But the evident devotional nature of the author lends a lyrical quality to his narrative, which is easily the best work among the later day Śaiva literary production.

OTHER WRITING

The Siddhas were revolutionaries from the Śaiva fold, they revolted from everything orthodox and ritualistic, they have left behind a substantial volume of good poetry, which employs the spoken language with power and banter to ridicule orthodox beliefs and customs, it had a tremendous effect on the masses.

One of the important contributions of Śaivism to literature is its later devotional poetry Long after the Śaiva canon was compiled, devotional literature has been growing and we find later day poets offering large volumes of their songs as devotional tributes at the feet of not only Śiva, but Śakti, Muruga and Vināyaka There are innumerable such poems, both merely as devotional offerings, and also as literary *prabandha* pieces. Eminent writers in this field are Kumaragurupara swami and Śivaprakaśa swami.

The musical pieces of Muttu Tāndavar and Gōpāla Krişna Bhārati are also devotional pieces of high lyrical quality, and charged with deep emotional fervour and passionate outburst.

Tāyumānavar and Rāmalinga swami complete the picture of later Śaiva literature. Rāmalinga swami was contemporary with Minaksi sundaram Pillai and Āṛumukha navalar of the mid-19th century While Rāmalinga wrote simple direct language coming from the heart, Pillai always wrote a laboured style, packed with complicated thoughts in complicated language. He is certainly the most voluminous writer of modern days. He has written a score of *purāṇas* and a

hundred *prabandhas* Occasionally there may be easy readable verse in him, but on the whole he is heavy.

Ārumukha navalar is deservedly hailed as the maker of modern prose His work began with a purpose Hailing from Jaffna, he found that many of his own kith and kin embraced Christianity, lured by the bright education and opportunities for material advancement which the missionaries offered. He was sad, but he did not give in He felt that lack of early religious training was responsible for the young men being converted and so went about preaching and writing small Śaiva catechisms, even like the Christian missionary He was out to inform and convince, and so his style was always simple, direct and to the point, and went straight to the heart He was never verbose or heavy He wrote only on Śaiva themes and his language never failed in its appeal Many prose works were written by him and they are models of elegant prose, not only in the 19th century, but for all time.

POEMS ON OTHER DEITIES

One aspect of the development of Śaiva literature is the writing of poems on Śakti Poems on Muruga are found in *Pattuppattu* and in the 9th Book of the Śaiva canon, poems on Vināyaka in the 11th Book Songs in praise of Śakti are no doubt found in *Silappadhikāram* but separate poems are not found in early literature Kavirāja Pandita (16th century) has translated *Soundaryalahari* of Śankara into Tamil verse and, though it does not rank high as poetry, it was the precursor of many more writings in praise of Śakti. *Sarasvati antādi* (12th century) and *Sakala kalāvalli mālai*

(17th century) are in praise of Sarasvati. Varagunarāma Kulasēkhara Pāndiya's *Ambikai mālai* (16th century) and Kumara gurupara's *Mīnākṣi Ammai Pillai - Tamil* are well known works in praise of Śakti, but *Abhirāmi antādi* (of the 18th century) was instantly popular and remains so even today These songs have inspired the national poet Bhārati to sing his Śakti songs

VAISNAVA LITERATURE

MANIPRAVALA

We have spoken about the Vaisnava canon in an earlier chapter Here we shall say a few words about the Vaisnava works of a purely religious character.

The Vaisnavas revel in Sanskrit terminology[1] even for the names of their Tamil Saints Malisai is always Bhaktisāra , Āndāl is Gōda , Nammālvār is Śathakōpa and so on It should be stated at the outset that the history of Vaisnava religious writing starts with two handicaps , one is that the theological writers had all without any exception written and encouraged the writing of only Sanskrit works , where they found this inadequate for their purpose, they invented an artificial and unnatural Sanskritic - Tamil prose style, known as the *manipravāla* (mixture of gem and coral) which is an unhappy mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil [2] This style started with about ninety per cent Sanskrit and ten per cent Tamil in the 11th century, and ended up by the 16th century with fifty per cent Sanskrit and fifty per cent Tamil

The second handicap was that the early Vaisnava Ācāryas had always to contend against the advaitins of the Śankara school even from the days of Rāmānuja The Śankara school always swore by Sanskrit and so the Vaisnavas had also to swear by Sanskrit, if they were to voice any effective opposition

to that school This element completely conditioned the early Vaisnava thought and writing, and it partly explains the innovation of the *manipravāla*.

The first writer to employ this *manipravāla* style is Tiru Kurugaip-piran Pillān, disciple of Rāmānuja, who commissioned him to write an orthodox religious gloss on *Tiruvāymoli* of Nammālvār It is called the *Ārāyirappadi*, gloss of six thousand *granthas*, a *grantha* being the equivalent of a couplet of 16 voiced letters in each line The style of Pillān is a very difficult one, almost completely in Sanskrit. Apart from the fact that it advanced the cause of Rāmānuja's philosophical doctrines, it has not contributed in the least to the development of the Tamil language But it had one significant result - four different *manipravāla* commentaries were written after him on the *Tiruvāymoli*, the 9 thousand, the 24 thousand, the 36 thousand and the 12 thousand These were relatively in easier *manipravāla* The 36 thousand, called the *Īdu*, being the largest, has been hailed as the source book of all Visistādvaita (Vaisnava) philosophy and is the greatest contribution in elucidating the thoughts of Nammālvār

But one thing should be noted These *manipravāla* commentaries are not commentaries in the sense of those we had earlier examined in the chapter of that name. The verses of Nammālvār here annotated by them, merely serve as pegs on which to hang their own ideas of religion, philosophy and *purānic* lore. All the thoughts the writers express cannot be deduced from the text But yet their exposition is indeed interesting, enjoyable in their own right, and exhilarating

The greatest commentator of all was Periya Āccān Pillai who wrote an elaborate gloss on the entire Vaisnava canon [3] His exposition of Āndāl's *Tirup-pāvai* is deservedly the most famous.

GURU PARAMPARAI

An important section of the Vaisnava writing of the period is the *Guru paramparai*, an account in the *manipravāla* style, setting forth the legendary stories of the Ālvārs and the Ācāryas (or the spiritual preceptors) of Vaisnavism Although the stories of the Ālvārs here narrated are mere legend, the part relating to the Ācāryas is almost fully historical and can be relied upon as an authentic chronicle of events, omitting exaggerations and narrations of miracles, which were a characteristic of the times It also unlocks a window for us on the day to day life in the spiritual brotherhood of the Vaisnava holy orders

MINOR POEMS

But these apart, Vaisnava literature does not appear to be a continuous stream of Tamil literary productivity It appears to have dried up after Nammālvār for a period of about two hundred and fifty years, till Amutanār composed his hundred verses (*antādi*) on Rāmānuja This poem has flashes of brilliant poetry and was included by Rāmānuja himself in the Vaisnava canon. A few years later a minor poet wrote the hundred verses (*antādi*) on Śathakōpar (Nammālvār) This poem also ranks high as good lyrical poetry, praising the *ācārya*

VEDANTA DESIKA

The above two are merely minor poems and there have been one or two much smaller pieces; but

the main stream was dry again, till a versatile genius in the person of Vēdānta Dēśika appeared on the scene. He gave new life in his days to the Vaisnava sect and and from him Vaisnavam branched off into two different directions - the Northern, taking after him with headquarters at Kancipuram, and the Southern, from his contemporary Pillai Lokācārya with headquarters at Sri Rangam The two sects had some doctrinal differences which the passage of time had only helped to widen They are today as separated from each other as any two entirely unrelated religions can be

Vēdānta Deśika was a towering personality who wrote a hundred manuals in Sanskrit and, very much unlike the general run of the Vaisnava ācāryas, wrote also twenty poems in Tamil Probably he felt that without handling religion through the mother tongue, his new *vadakalai* could have no future To the northern school of Vaisnavism, these have scriptural authority Some of Dēśika's poems make good poetry couched in simple and lyrical language Perhaps his only compeer in Vaisnavism can be Manavāla mā munigal, a century later than him, who has also written theological treatises both in Sanskrit and in Tamil. He is hailed as the great leader of the Southern school, the Periya Jīyar.

PURANAS

After the fall of the Vijayanagar dynasty, there seems to have been intense literary activity in all fields of Tamil writing There was a sudden spurt of literary activity, which resulted in two Tamil renderings of the great *Bhāgavata* epic from two Sanskrit sources. They fill a gap long existing in the epics

featuring Vishnu: the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* had been written in Tamil earlier, but not as religious *purānas*, but as literary epics The *Bhāgavata* was now done in Tamil, not as an epic, but as a *purāna* *Sthala purānas*, of which we have hundreds in Śaivism, are very scarce in Vaisnavism. Two large books, *Kūdal purāna* and *Kuruhūr mānmiyam* were written in the 16th century, but their literary standard is poor.

OTHER POEMS

Pillai-perumāl Aiyangār, patronised by Tirumalai Nāyak, is perhaps the last illustrious figure in Vaisnava literary history His works, called the Eight Minor poems (*Asta prabandham*), are favourites not only among the Vaisnavas but also among all the other sects Many of his songs are charged with a positive fervour of devotion and service to Lord Visnu and have a high emotional quality in them A writer by name Śathakōpadāsa wrote a metrical biography of the Ālvārs, but the book is of poor literary quality.

A *Tiruppuhal* on the model of Arunagiri nātha, in praise of the 108 Visnu shrines, was composed much later and this almost completes the survey of Vaisnava literature down to the present day

Notes

1 It may be noted that the Sanskrit names for the Alvars are not mentioned in the first *Guru paramparai* (Six thousand) but are mentioned only in later works

2 In fairness to the acarvas it should be stated that they did not consciously attempt artificiality in writing, they conversed in this Sanskritic-Tamil language and merely wrote it down

3 His commentary on Periyalvar's *Tirumoli* was not available, even a few years after his day So, later Manavala ma munigal wrote a commentary on it,

VĒDĀNTA WRITING

The last part of the Vedas is the Vēda-anta, the *Upanisads*. These are the source for all philosophical thought on the Indian soil. Each spiritual teacher interpreted the *Upanisads* in his own way. Through that difference in interpretation came into existence the Advaita of Śankara, the Viśistādvaita of Rāmānuja and the Dvaita of Madhva. These three schools are wholly Sanskrit based. But the Tamil peoples before Śankara did have a knowledge of philosophy. They believed, in the ancient past, in one God. That God had no name. By the beginning of the Christian era, the nameless God was worshipped as Śiva by the Śaivās and as Visnu by the Vaisnavas. When both their canons gave a great fillip to these concepts, they grew into separate religious sects by the 9th century A. D. Later Rāmānuja codified the theory and practice of the Vaisnava religion, no such codification was attempted at the period in Śaivism because the practice of Śaivism then was universal in Tamilnad. Innovation always requires definition, but the basic matrix, which never changes, required no definition.

SANKARA

In this context, about 240 years earlier than Rāmānuja, was born Śankara at Kāladi (which was then a Tamil speaking area, but later became part of the Malayalam speaking territory). He evolved a new

philosophy namely, that there is only one Reality and that is Brahman and that there is nought else He had then no work in Tamilnad, because the practice of religion advocated by the Śaiva Nayanmārs and the Vaisnava Ālvārs had a strong hold on the people at the time and his new tenets could scarcely have a following He went north and founded his own centre at Kānci. He wrote all his *Bhāsyas* at Banaras and established his advaita doctrines there He wrote everything in Sanskrit, though born in the Tamilnad, not a single Tamil word escaped him, This was natural because he had always to contend in the Sanskrit language with alien sects in North India.

His doctrines spread, later into Tamilnad also Although *all* the various religions are really vēdanta schools, the term vēdanta somehow attached itself to his school Rāmānuja wrote all his works in Sanskrit, to refute Śankara Madhva preached his philosophy outside the Tamil area and so we are not concerned with it here The Śaivas later wrote their books in Tamil and called their doctrines the Suddha-advaita

GITA IN TAMIL

In later years many books were written in Tamil in the Śankara school Sri-Bhattanār wrote his metric translation of the *Gīta* in the 13th century, on the Śankara vēdānta lines, and called it *Paramārtha darśana.* It contains the same number of 18 chapters, verses being 550 It is written in good Tamil It has no currency among the brahmins, but the non-brahmin followers of Śankara study it well Vādkēsari Alagiya Manavāla Jīyar wrote a *venbā* translation of the *Gīta* in the next century, following Rāmānuja,

it had no popularity among the Vaisnavas Kannudaiya Vallal incorporated many vēdanta concepts into his writings and helped the growth of the vēdanta thoughts in the Tamil language A modern *venba* translation had also been made for the *Gita*

TATTUVARAYA

But the greatest exponent of Śankara was Tattuvarāyar (15th century) His *Pāduturai*, *Adangalmurai* and other minor books, all expound the vēdānta thoughts, his two great anthologies, *Perum tirattu* and *Kurum tirattu* were also compiled towards this end His literary output was very vast. He holds a unique place in Tamil theological writing for three reasons One, he was the greatest exponent of the Śankara vēdanta in the Tamil language Two, his complete works include five philosophical treatises, *Mōhavataip-parani*, *Ajñavataip-parani*, *Īsvara gīta*, *Brahma gīta* and *Saśivarna bōdham*, all of them are of the vēdānta school And thirdly, he has invented a hundred new poetic forms which never existed before him – such as the parrot, the *kuyil*, the cock, the lizard, the snake songs and many others. He was a giant among his contemporaries and in order to create a place for Śankara vēdanta in Tamil literature, he made these innovations boldly and successfully Though an advaitin, his writings seem to be more of Śiva-advaita and less of absolute advaita

Sri-Bhattanār and Tattuvarāyar were brahmins, but that community completely rejected their writings, if the writings have any following, it is only among the non-Sanskrit-knowing classes The same is the fate of *Prabhōdha Candrōdayam*, a large advaita work of the

17th century written by Tiruvēnkata nāthar[1], it is an epic type of work, studied only by the non-brahmin advaitins.

LATER WRITING

Two other vēdanta works deserve mention here. One is *Kaivalya-navanītam* and the other, *Nānājīva-vātak-kattalai* The first is a metrical treatise by one Tāndavarāya swami, composed in the 18th century It has 310 verses (*Kaivalya* is the absolute state of the soul, free from all bonds, that state is release, *navanītam* is butter, the essence of the experience of that state) The title means that the treatise is the essence of the thoughts of many works on the subject It is divided into two chapters – the explanation of the Reals, and the removal of doubts The book gives a clear exposition of the vēdanta position in regard to the *Paramatmā* and the *jīvātmā* All that is seen is unreal, the I is beyond the five sheaths of the body, God is the cause of the universe, the Intelligence-form of God and the Intelligence-form of the *jīvātmā* are the same, one who realises his own form as such is the *jīvanmukta*, his life is one of bliss this is the substance of the book Although recent from the point of view of time, the book is written in good Tamil and it gives a lucid and simple exposition of the Vēdānta. It has become a classic in a very short period The other book is a short prose work giving out the principles of the Vēdanta Both of these are deservedly popular among Tamil Vēdanta scholars

Many works of Śankara were translated into Tamil, prose and verse, to the end of the 19th century

and the beginning of the 20th Śivaprakaśa swami, the Vīraśaiva poet of the 17th century, had done his *Vēdānta Cūdāmani* in about 180 verses in translation. As usual these Tamil works are studied only by the non-brahmin advaitins

The Śankara math ever since its inception had existed only for the brahmins. They had never encouraged the study of the Tamil vēdanta works; they swear only by Sanskrit Other vēdanta scholars had founded centres for themselves and these have been fostering the growth of the Tamil vēdanta works and their commentaries

Reference

1 *Vide* page 104 under epic literature

VĪRA ŚAIVA WRITING

The contribution of the Vīra saiva poets and theologians to the growth of Tamil Literature has been quite substantial The Vīra śaiva cult was propagated by Basava in the Kannada country in the middle of the 12th century It took several hundred years to filter into the heart of the Tamil country From the 16th century we have books of varying quality written by persons professing this cult. Philosophical treatises, devotional poems, ethical books, *purānas* and commentaries on religious books have been written by them Basava by his new revolutionary philosophy tried to evolve a new casteless society, although the Vīra śaiva cult gained popularity in the Kannada country, it is doubtful if this doctrine ever gained here the currency that he desired

Rēvana siddha was probably the first writer. He wrote *Aharādi Nighantu*, a lexicographical work, and *Sivajñānadīpam*, a philosophical treatise The latter is a very good Śaiva Siddhānta work, the author devotes only a few verses at the end of the treatise to explain the Vīra śaiva concepts *Prabhulinga Līlai* and *Siddhānta Śikhāmani* of Sivaprakāśa swami, *Advaita Venbā* of Siddha Sivaprakāśa and the works of Śāntalinga swami and of Kumāra dēva are the most important philosophical works of this sect and all of them belong to the 17th century.

Among devotional poems, those of Sıvaprakāśa on his master Śıva jñāna pālaya Dēśıka, on the Vengai temple and on some others, and the Tırup-pōrūr poems of Cıdambara swāmı deserve specıal mentıon. The latter contaın some very good pieces of poetry of a fine lyrıcal character, whıch will stand the test of tıme, endearıng themselves to all people at all times. *Nālvar nānmanı mālaı* of Sıvaprakāśa, in praıse of the four Śaıva acaryas, ıs very well known

Sivaprakāśa's *Nannerı* ıs probably the only book on ethics wrıtten by a Vīra saıva, ıt ıs a short poem of good maxıms ın easy language, studied even today by school chıldren His *purānas* possess the lıterary flourish characteristıc of hım. *Basava purāna* by an unknown author ıs a very ambıtıous large work of a later perıod, on Basava and other top figures ın the Vīra śaiva hagıology, but has poor poetıc merıt

Cidambara swamı again has wrıtten very good commentarıes[1] on some of the theologıcal works of hıs master and the others and they are eagerly studıed by students of relıgıon, hıs commentary on one book on non-killıng, *Kolaımaruttal*, is very valuable

The study of logic was consıdered ımportant to an understandıng of phılosophy, Sıvaprakāśa has wrıtten a short manual on logıc, of course adapted from the Sanskrıt

In early Vīra śaıvısm, the Śaıva Siddhānta concepts were predominant But as days passed, the glamour of Śankara took a strong hold on the mınds of the members and wrıters of that sect By about the 19th century, that sect had drıfted away from Śaıva

Siddhānta and identified itself, as it were, with Śankara vēdanta. Siva prakāśa swami has written books on all the three schools His *Śatamani mālai*, is an *āgama* translation, a Śaiva Siddhānta work, his *Siddhānta Śikhāmani* is a Vīra Śaiva work, his *Vēdānta Cūdāmani* is a Śankara Vēdānta work

Note

1 This swami is said to have written an elaborate gloss on *Tiruvacakam*, said tobe in the hands of sectarian bigots, it has not seen the light of day It is doubtful if the manuscript even if it really exists today, could survive till this day in a usable condition, since it is said to have been never handled.

JAINA LITERATURE

Unlike the Buddhists, the Jains had contributed quite a substantial volume to the growth of Tamil literature and its grammar This was possible largely because they had the Pandiyan domains under their own rule for more than three centuries, from the third to the sixth They had tried their hand at almost all the fields of Tamil literature, with varying degrees of success. We shall examine them here.

GRAMMAR

Their most successful field was the field of grammar As the first Jains, namely the Kalabhra rulers of Madurai and their group, were foreigners, that is, as they did not have Tamil as their mother-tongue, they were able to look at the Tamil language with detachment and extract the truth and the rules about it from a linguistic point of view and write manuals on Tamil grammar with tremendous success. The highlights of their performance in this field are *Yāpparunkalam* and its *Kārikai* on prosody, *Nēminātham* on letters and words, *Vaccaṇandi mālai* on poetics, *Nambi ahapporuḷ* on the love theme, and finally the most modern *Nannūl* (13th century) dealing with the letters and words, the lexicon *Cūdāmaṇi Nighaṇṭu* comes last. All these are substantial contributions to the concerned subjects and to that extent they had no doubt enriched the language and its literature.

Grammar requires an analytical brain which the Jain writers had in a large measure and hence their success in grammar writing

EPIC WRITING

Next we shall take up epic poetry This has been already examined in a separate chapter The Jain writers have indeed large volumes to their credit The *Perum kathai* is perhaps the first epic written by a Jain It is an original work, although the plot thereof is taken from the Hindu legends The epic is in the *āsiriyam* metre, like *Silappadhikāram* and *Manimēkhalai*, and the chief aim of the author seems to be the glorification of life in the Tamil country, its art and culture and its richness It is a marvel of composition The other two books, *Jīvaka cintamani* and *Cūlāmani* are about princes whose life seems to have been taken from the Jain *purānas* Each prince goes through a series of marriages, a few battles and other trials of life and finally ends up with renunciation *Cintāmani* has some Jain doctrines mentioned in it, these are less in *Cūlāmani* Both are important in the history of Tamil literature as some of the early attempts to harness the *viruttam* metre to the larger narrative poetry. They also have occasional flashes of poetry in a few verses There had been quite a few long narrative poems in the same period, like *Śāntipurānam*, *Nārada caritai* etc, but these are all lost *Yaśōdhara kāvya* and *Udayanakumāra kāvya*, a few centuries later, are much smaller poems, they are puerile works from all points of view and hardly deserve the name *kāvya* (epic). *Mērumantara purāna*, of the 15th century is a story about two princes, written with the purpose of propagating the Jain tenets. On the whole, surveying

the Jain performance in the epic field we feel that it is a failure There is nothing to recommend any book as a great work. Only *Perum kathai* is remarkable for the very luxuriant and elaborate descriptions the author revels in, but it is not a jain story

ETHICAL WRITING

We have here a dozen books dealing with the ethical subjects *Nāladi* and *Palamoli* rank foremost, of these *Nāladi* is one of the best books on the subject while *Palamoli* is a very good imitation, closely following in its footsteps Two other works are by Jains – *Sirupancamūlam* and *Ēlādi*, dealing with five and six subjects in each verse All the four are among the *18 Kīlkkanakku* *Aranericcāram* of a much later period, is a very good poetic piece, where the Jain author, in tune with the trend of his times, tries to give out some universal truths These books are all in the *venbā* metre Generally, the Jains are remarkably successful in dealing with ethical poetry.

COMMENTARIES

Many are the commentaries written by the Jains, both on literary works and on grammatical treatises. It is noteworthy that the first commentaries on literature and grammar (excepting the one by Nakkīrar on *Iraiyanār kaḷaviyal*) were probably written by them. We refer to Manakkudavar's commentary on *Kural* and Iḷampūranar's exposition of *Tolkāppiyam*. Both are the first expositions on the two great works. It is to the great credit of Ilampūranar, that he has written on the three books of *Tolkappiyam*, unlike the other writers (except Naccinārkkiniyar) who wrote only on the second book. It is to his everlasting

glory that he discovered *Tolkāppiyam* and wrote on it, paving the way for future writers. Other commentary writers are insignificant except the anonymous one who wrote on *Yāpparumkalam*. Among the great figures in this field he towers as a giant His gloss opens up a window on the lost treasures of grammar and prosody in the 8th to the 10th centuries, when there seems to have been a very intense and unceasing activity in this field Along with the *Kalaviyal* commentator and the later Adiyārkku nallār, he is the only writer who makes us shed many a tear on the books lost for ever.

RELIGION

Of devotional poetry by the Jains, there is no work of any value This is perhaps because God as such has no esteemed place in the Jaina scheme of things; an ethical conduct alone has Only *Tiru Nūṟṟantādi* of Avirōdhi āḷvār[1] (14th century) seems to be written with an element of devotional ecstasy and lyric note, which is the characteristic of all Śaiva and Vaiśnava books Beside this work, others like *Tiruk-kalambakam* pale into total insignificance.

Of purely religious books by the Jains, we have three and all of them are important. *Nīlakēśi* was written to refute the doctrines of Buddhism as expounded by *Kundalakēśi* a large work, now lost It is a good book as far as it explains Jain doctrines, and it has a good commentary. *Arungalac-ceppu* in the *kural venba* metre is a good manual of certain aspects of the Jain householder's life. The third book is *Jiva sambō-dhanai*, a book of Jain doctrines in prose and verse.

The verse is good *venbā*, in imitation of *Nalavenba*, while the prose is also a classical *manipravāla* style. The book deserves to be more widely known.

Speaking of *manipravāla*, we should mention *Śri Purāna*, which is a complete prose-*purāna* of the Jains in the *manipravāla* style It is the only large work of its kind in the language. Its purpose is an exposition of the Jain doctrines. Unlike the Vaisnava *manipravāla*, this is extremely artificial, it appears as though the writer stopped now and then, hunted for Sanskrit equivalents, and replaced the Tamil word with the Sanskrit word or phrase. There is no flow in the language

The Jains decry womanhood but it is very strange that *Nīlakēśi* is a long poem whose only character is a woman, the heroine herself, so also is the fact that Nambi wrote his grammar on *ahapporul* or erotic love. In the same manner, it is hard to explain how an *ula*[2] came to be written in praise of a Jain shrine, where the usual theme is that young women, in their seven stages of life, see the deity in procession, and fall in love with it. In Jainism there is no personality of the *Arhat* to fall in love with

Notes

1. This poet, as his name suggests, was a Vaisnava devotee (*alvar*) before he became a Jain convert, hence the element of devotional emotion in his *antadi*.
2. *Appandai nathar ula*, University of Madras, 1972 Here women in the seven stages do not fall in love with the hero, they are just attracted by his lustrous personality, which they praise,

BUDDHIST WRITING

Buddhistic influence must have been felt in the field of Tamil letters by the beginning of the Christian era Ilambōdhi is a rare Buddhist name among the poets of the sangham age The Buddhists, unlike the Jains, had never assumed power anywhere in the Tamilnad and so their religion had not made any headway here There are indeed very beautiful stray verses in praise of the Buddha cited in the commentaries on *Yāpparunkalam* and on *Vīrasōliyam*, but there are only one Buddhist work and one grammar by a Buddhist *Manimēkhalai*,[1] said to be one of the five major epics, was written by Sīttalai Sāttanār for the purpose of expounding the Buddhist doctrines, it is considered a sequel to *Silappadhikāram* *Vīrasōliyam*,[2] the only ancient grammar dealing with the traditional five branches of Tamil, was written by the Buddhist Buddhamitra of Ponparri From citations in the old commentaries, we learn that there were many other Buddhist works such as the famed epic *Kundalakēsi*, *Bimbisārakathai*, *Siddhāntatohai*, *Mānāvūrp-padikam* etc, but not one of them is available today The stray verses referred to are in beautiful lyrical form and it is indeed a great loss to Tamil that the books containing such verses are no longer available The doctrines of the four schools of Buddhism – the

Soutrāntika, *Yogācāra*, *Mādhyamika* and *Vaibhāśika* – come in for serious philosophical refutation[3] at the hands of the Śaivas but no Tamil philosophical work of any of those schools is extant.

Even traces of Buddhism had ceased to exist in Tamilnad by the 8th century, we find in the legends connected with Saint Mānikkavācakar that the Buddhists had to go over to Cidambaram all the way from Ceylon to engage in a religious disputation with him. there was no Buddhist worth the name in the whole of South India then We find from inscriptions however that a prince of Kadāram (part of modern Malaysia) caused a Buddha Vihāra to be built in Nagappattinam and that Kulōttunga I (1070 – 1120) gave many endowments to that temple

References

1 *Vide* chapter on epic literature page 99

2 *Vide* chapter on grammar page 27

3 *Sivajnana siddhiyar parapaksa*, verses 64–142.

THE PURĀNAS

Purāna means an old story The number of *purānas* in the Tamıl language ıs legion The great *purānas* in the Sanskrıt language had been eıghteen ın number and several works in the Tamıl language purport to be translatıons and condensatıons of those *purānas* *Macca (Matsya) purāna*, *Kūrma purāna*, *Lınga purāna* and *Vāyu samhıta* are large complete metrical compositıons from the Sanskrıt books of the same name There is also a very late metrıcal translation of *Śıva mahapurāna* at the turn of the last century All these are Śaıva books and belong to the relıgious category *Vısnu purana*, *Mārkandēya purāna* and a host of others are in prose, the first ıs a Vaisnava *purāna*.

Purāna laksana, or the characteristıcs of a *purāna*, have been said to be five ın Sanskrit. Of these three relate to the contents They are the *vamsa*, *manvantara* and *vamśānucarıta* - the partıcular dynasty, the evolution of tıme from the ancıent past and the hıstory of various other dynasties, and also cosmogony. All these subjects are fully dealt with ın the major *purānas*, generally ın the ıntroductory part.

It ıs lıkely that many faıry tales and folk songs had been ıncorporated ınto the purānas ın the remote past To gıve an example. *Sevvandı-purāna* of Tıruccırāppaḷḷi mentions the story of Śıva enshrıned there,

having appeared as the mother of a lone young woman, when she was in the pangs of child birth and when her natural mother could not reach her in time because of the floods in the Kāvēri, the *purāna* says the Lord was thenceforth known as Tāyumānavar, He who became also the mother. This might very well have been a primitive fairy tale of the region

The Tamil *purāṇas* in general are of several categories For purpose of discussion here, we may classify them into the following categories the epic, the biography, the *sthala purāna*, and the religious *purāna*

EPIC PURANA

Purānas of the epic type are called *itihāsas* They are *Kanda purāna* of Kacciyappa Sivācārya running to over ten thousand verses and the two *Bhāgavatas*, *Itihāsa Bhāgavata* of Sevvaic-cūduvār and *Purāna Bhāgavata* of Arulāladāsa, the first contains 4973 verses and the second 9147 *Mēru mantara purana* by Vāmana muni in 1405 verses is a Jain book, of the epic type

Kanda Purāna is a very large work, purporting to sing of the exploits of Kumāra and his slaying of Sūrapadma It has been conceived of by the Śaivas of a later day as a Śaiva counterpart to the story of Rama in *Kamba Rāmāyana*. The story runs parellel to the *Rāmāyana* in all its details, but the grand conceptions of Kambar, his portrayal of character, his probe into the depths of the human heart, depiction of dramatic scenes and high watermark of poetry are lacking here Occasionally we may get glimpses of some good poetry but these do not make

it great poetry Its chief importance lies in the fact that it deals elaborately with the story of Kumāra in a manner suitable for religious discourses and that it is full of Śaiva Siddhanta philosophical concepts

The two *Bhāgavatas* deal elaborately with the story of Viṣṇu as the Supreme Lord and of his ten *avatāras* (incarnations) They are typical *purānas* and do not lay any serious claim to higher poetry The Jain *purāna* mentioned is in the nature of a miniature epic on the lines of *Cintāmani* and *Cūlāmani*

STHALA PURANA

Purānas of the *sthala purāna* type are innumerable There is a *purāna* for every little shrine in the Tamilnad It is always in verse, running even to several thousand verses occasionally (*Māyūra purana*-6519, *Tirunelvēli* over 9,000) The *sthala purānas* have at their commencement chapters glorifying the shrine, the deity installed there, the temple tank and the temple tree *Sthala purāna* is only glorified local legend, written up with a religious bias As has been said, it may be considered just a collection of local folk tales This characteristic always holds out an appeal to the common man They have been one of the influences which always hold out a ray of hope and redemption to the erring mortal Whatever sin a man might have committed, he will be redeemed if he sincerely repents in his heart, turns over a new leaf and prays to God Such is the teaching of all the *sthala purānas* Prayer to the deity in the local shrine absolves him of all sin. Homage to the deity implies homage to the place, the temple tank, the local river and the temple tree. Such books were first written in

the 16th century and they continue to be written to the present day. Naturally the literary merit of such books cannot be great.

But yet there are a few of outstanding merit. One such is the *Tiruvilayādal purāna* of Paranjōti (about 1700 A D) It is written in forceful and fluent language, having a power and sweetness about it Its style is charming and elegant and it contains good poetry also, but in the absence of the human element and character, it does not rise to the level of great poetry Yet its devotional content is supremely lyrical and this will continue to influence the Śaiva mind for a long time to come Other such *sthala purānas* of any importance are *Kurralap-purāna* of Tirikūtarājappa kavirāyar, *Kancip-purāna* of Sivajñāna swami and *Tanikaip-purāna* of Kacciyappar The greatest *sthala purāna* writer of all time was Minaksi sundaram Pillai of the mid-19th century

BIOGRAPHICAL PURANA

Turning to the biographical type, we find two important works – *Periya purānam* of Sēkkilar (dealt with earlier) and *Tiruvādavūr adigal purānam* of Kadavul mā munivar. The latter is a small work of 545 verses. It is composed with a large proportion of rhythmic verses But the only poetic sentiment that runs through the entire work is *bhakti* or religious devotion, no other element can be found in it and this of course detracts from its poetic quality The life of Sēkkilār and the life of Nambiyāndār nambi, though written by Umāpati Śivācārya, have in them only the predominant purpose of narrating the genesis of *Periya purāṇam*

and the discovery of the Śaiva canon Thus they fail to have any great poetic appeal. *Pulavar purāna* of Dandapāni swami, and *Sēyttondar purāna* of Cokkalingam pillai are respectively the biographies of poets and the lives of the devotees of Muruga They are modern attempts of the biographical type There are many others also.

Hari samaya dīpam of Sathakōpadāsa and *Guru-parampara prabhāvam* (verse) of Vadivalagiyanambi dāsa are also biographical *purānas* in Vaisnavism in the later centuries.

RELIGIOUS PURANA

Coming to the last category, we find very many *purānas* extolling religious practices All of them are of a large size. They speak of the Śaiva emblems, rituals and worship, and dwell at length on the merit accruing from a worship of Śiva, the observance of penances, the celebration of festivals, and the service to Śiva and Śiva *bhaktas*. The two *Upadēśa kāndams* written by two disciples of Kacciyappa Śivācārya are the earliest and they belong to the 15th century

We find from history that there was a heavy rush in *purāna* making in Tamil in the 16th century One explanation perhaps is that several of the Pāndiyas who had fled Madura on the Mohammedan invasion had by now settled and consolidated themselves comfortably in parts of Tirunelvēli and were able to extend their patronage to the poetic art Some of the Pāndiyas were themselves writers and had contributed thousands of verses to *purānic* literature All of their *purānas* are large religious ones. In fact, most of the

religious practices and observances in the Śaiva society today are on the lines laid down in their books. *Śiva dharmōttara*, considered to be an *upāgama*, also belongs to this category They always give elaborate accounts of the *bhaktas* who sinned, then repented and were redeemed by the grace of God.

We do not find any such *purāna* written in Vaisnavism

Reference

1 For an exhaustive treatment of the subject of *puranas*, *vide* my History of Tamil Literature, 16th century - Part I, Purana Literature (Tamil) to be released shortly

MINOR POEMS — I

Minor poems as such begin to be written in great profusion from the 16th century onwards *Prabandha marapiyal*, a short grammatical manual of that period on poetics, mentions for the first time that the *prabhandhas* are of 96 categories. Although we had books on poetics from the 8th century, this number had not been specified previously A *prabhandam* is a minor poem sung on a divine being or a patron, its subject may be *aham* or *puram*, it may be in any type of metre, from *āsiriyam* to *viruttam*, or the long drawn out *kalivenbā*, the number of verses in a poem may also be anything, yet some titles have specified the number of verses as 5, 8, 20, 30, 40, 70 and even upto 400. (*Prabandha* means well composed)

Prabandhams have been sung even in the days of the sangham and of the period of the Śaiva and the Vaisnava hymns *Tolkāppiyam*, *Purattinai iyal* mentions a few types of such minor poems of the *puram* themes, some are also found as occasional verses in the *Pura nānūru* *Ārruppadai* had been many in the sangham period Poems named according to the number of the verses in them such as the forty, the fifty and the seventy etc are found among the *18 Kīlk-kanakku* Other poems such as the *Irattaimaṇi mālai*, *Antādi*, *Madal*, *Elukūrrirukkai*, *Maram*, *Anga-mālai*, *Paḷḷi-yelucci*, *Ulā*, *Mummaṇikkōvai* etc. had been

in existence during the seventh and the ninth centuries in the Śaiva and the Vaisnava canon. The number and variety of the composition grew with the centuries We shall notice below the salient features of the more important minor poems.

ARRUPPADAI

Among the *puram* poems, the *Ārruppadai* had been the earliest We find many examples of it in *Pura nānūru*, of course these are all short occasional verses. In *Pattuppāttu* we have five poems of this class, all lengthy ones in the *āsiriyam* metre. The *ārruppadai* is a poem where a dancer, a musician, or a poet or devotee is guided to go to a patron of arts, or to the presence of God in a temple, display his art or poetry, supplicate himself to the patron with devotion, and receive munificence at his hands The guide himself had once been a poor and indigent person, but had become affluent by going to that patron, singing before him, and getting lavish gifts from him In the course of a long poem, there are many pen-portraits and interesting descriptions of the patron himself, his place, the manner of his feeding the poor, the sweet welcome that he offers, and the rich presents he gives and the peace and joy that descend on the recipient The most famous *arruppadai* is the one on Muruga, *Tiru Murugārruppadai* which has been collected into two anthologies - as the first poem in *Pattupāttu* of the Sangham age, and as a devotional poem in the 11th Book of the Śaiva canon during the early 11th century

In *Tiru Murugārruppadai*, the human patron gives place to The Patron of all, God, where the poet

introduces the aspirant to the path and the presence of God Later *arruppadai* has been few, but from the 16th century onwards, a new type, the *virali-arruppadi* had been developed

BHARANI

The *Bharani* is perhaps the most important separate poem on the theme of war. It generally sings of the glory of the victory of the ruling chief. The first and deservedly most famous is the *Kalingattupparani*, sung by Jayamkondār in honour of the victory of King Kulōttunga I over the North Kalinga forces by about 1112 A D It celebrates a real war, a real hero and a real commander of his army The poem consists of about 600 couplets mostly in a rhythmic lilting metre, the sound and pace of the metre varying with the events of the narrative

The story content of the *Bharaṇi* is as follows. The news of the Chōḷa victory reaches the city Young women go round waking up the other women to welcome the victors and celebrate the victory The next scene shifts to the actual battle field. Kāli, the patron deity of war, is enshrined in a temple in an arid desert. She is surrounded by a large army of ghosts, living in that fearful wilderness. Her attendants and the entire army of ghosts are lean and famished, through long starvation The ghosts usually feed on human flesh strewn about in the battle fields, but since there had been no war for long, they are now famished. A visiting ghost plays many feats of magic before Kāli, conjuring up a battle scene This makes the hunger of the ghosts more acute and they pray to the goddess to call a halt to the display. Just

then another ghost breaks in with the news of a real battle which the Chōla king had just then fought and won. With gaping mouths and watering lips, the ghosts make a stampede to the battle field, gather and cook the flesh and meat and brains of the fallen in the battle, have a hearty meal, and thank the king and the goddess for thus giving them sumptuous food.

For the amorous and erotic nature of the first waking-up scene, the description of the desert, of the temple and of the goddess Herself, of the famished appearance of the ghosts, of the relaxation of the king on the banks of the Pālāru, the march of the armies, the actual battle and of the ghastly yet humour-laden feast of the ghosts there, the book has no parallel in the vast range of Tamil literature The erotic verses here are on a high poetic level and they never stoop low. This poem is one on an actual battle while in later such poems we have no real fight at all. *Dakkayāgap-parani* and *Hiranyavataip-parani* describe purānic battles, while others like *Ajñavataip parani* and *Pāśavataip-parani* deal only with allegorical battles. Hence no other poem of the kind comes anywhere near this in realistic poetic quality Besides, *Kalingattup-paraṇi* is also valuable for the light it throws on the genealogy of the Chōlas upto Kulōttunga I

The author has sung here a large variety of *chandams* which had become a model for all later writers Figures like the onomatopoeia and the pun are freely employed with startling effect The whole poem has a dramatic setting and there are scores of verses which are each the enacting of a separate dramatic scene One writer has remarked that the

'the praise lavished on the poem needs to be qualified' and that it has no message [1] The estimate is not correct The whole poem has to be seen with a sense of humour and has to be viewed also from the background of contemporary history There are scores of verses here which are supremely emotional lyrics The battle field may not be the place for emotional poetry but within the limited sphere the poet has achieved marvellous success The book does leave a message It had infused the greatest patriotism in the people of the Chōla country and had helped to fortify the Chōla empire for two centuries after it was written No wonder the author Jayamkondār was hailed for this short poem, even in his own life time, a *kavi-cakravartti*, an emperor among poets, and the phrase, '*a Jayamkondār for a bharani*' was coined

PILLAI TAMIL

Another important minor poem is the *pillai-Tamil* song on childhood This poem is now generally in ten sections with ten verses to each section Every decad here carries a refrain from which the decad takes its title as *muttam*, *tālu*, *senkīrai* etc But Periyāḷvār originally sang a number of such poems on Krisna, the child of Yasōda. The poems are polished gems of dazzling beauty and form, rightly part of the Vaisnava canon Some five centuries after him, Ottakkūttar selected a few topics from Ālvār and Āndāl and evolved his first *pillai-Tamil*, composed in praise of Kulōttunga Chōla II, when he was a crown prince. In later days, such poems have been composed on all the deities, except Lord Śiva[2], and on many chieftains. These poems are all in *chandam*, a rhythmic metre, mostly long, and are very popular even to this day.

Some of them are sung in musical concerts also Poems such as *Tiruccendūr Murugan pillai - Tamil, Mīnākṣi ammai pillai - Tamil* and *Muttukkumāraswāmi pillai - Tamil* are of high poetic quality and emotional religious fervour, and even today they melt listeners to tears *Sekkilar pillai - Tamil*, written by Mīnākṣi-sundaram Pillai by the middle of the 19th century, is a classic by itself Little would the Ālvār have dreamt that his innovation would develop to such proportions in later years Since all these poems are only in praise of deities and the like, they also belong to the class of *puram* pieces

There are many *pillai - Tamil* poems of the 20th century, of which special mention may be made of *Gandhi pillai - Tamil* by Raya Cokkalingam and *Kāvai Murugan pillai - Tamil* by Appulingam.

The last three sections of the poem vary when it is sung on a female deity, to suit the play habits of a female child ; it is usually this part that is extended to more than three sections by some poets

KALAMBAKAM

The *kalambakam* (a mixture) is a poem of usually one hundred verses, employing all the metres known, depicting both the *puram* and the *aham* themes The verses are strung together in the *antādi* form where the end word or syllable of a verse occurs as the opening word or syllable of the next The *kalambakam* is naturally very popular, and often very well done also, because of the wide scope both in the themes and in the metre All the moods and sentiments of poetry find expression here Eighteen parts are required to be incorporated into the poem The poem is as usual sung in praise of a deity or a patron. The one by an

unknown author on Nandivarma III, the Pallava ruler of Kānci, 9th century, is deservedly the most famous. It is also the best poetic piece The legend goes that he gave up his life for the mere joy of listening to a recitation of the poem, many a discriminating heart among the Tamil poetry lovers will easily applaud his action

Although manuals prescribe the topics for inclusion in the poem, the poet's imagination has conjured up many other topics also.

Next we shall speak a few words about some of the more important minor poems on the *aham* themes Four types of such poems here call for our attention - the *kovāi*, the *ulā*, the *madal* and the *dhūtu*

KOVAI

The *kōvai* is in a sense a connected narrative of the stray *aham* topics of the sangham poetry Each character in the love theme speaks · rarely does the poet himself speak. The sangham verses were in the *āsiriyam* metre, whereas the *kōvai* is written in the much more laborious *kattalai-kalitturai*, in which the syllables in every foot are counted as 16 or 17 and follow a particular sequence of arrangement. The first *kōvai* poem is *Pāndik-kōvai* [3] in praise of the Pāndiya Nedu māra who was the contemporary of Saint Sambandha, the entire book is not available today, from the fragments available, we are led to believe that it was a very large work, where more than one verse was composed on each topic The next *kōvai* in point of time is *Tiruk-kōvaiyār*, attributed to Saint Mānikkavācakar Perāsiriyar wrote a neat gloss on this This contains just 400 topics, the pattern of this *kōvai* and this

number have been adopted by most later writers, some had adopted topics exceeding even 500. Usually the *kōvai* has a hero of the story-events narrated, and another called a patron in whose honour the poem is sung. The only exception to this arrangement was the later *Ambikāpati-kōvai* (12th century) where there is no patron *Kōvai* poems have been composed even up to the present century, but their popularity has fast disappeared, because of the inelastic monotony of the subject and of the verse

We give below in a few words the substance of the *kōvai* in a connected narrative. A youth meets a handsome maiden in a cool bower and the two fall in love and immediately become man and wife. They part Some days later his friend helps him to meet her, and then her friend helps him The maiden who was till now watching over the family's *tinai* field, is now asked to return home The lover meets her during the day and then during the night, under great hazards Meanwhile, the moods of the girl make her people have recourse to a soothsayer called vēlan, in the mistaken belief that she is 'possessed' Now she expresses her desire that he should straightway come forward to marry her openly He leaves her for sometime on various pretexts He returns and sends her people presents to signify his willingness to marry her. But when they are not prepared to give her hand to him, the foster mother who is in the girl's secret, helps her to elope with her lover. He marries her in his own place They live together happily for sometime, when he goes away to a harlot He returns on hearing of the birth of a boy to his wife Then again he leaves her on a study mission, then on

the king's mission, and so on Lastly he makes some money, comes home and the two live happily ever after.

The *kōvai* poem seems to have had two purposes . one, the poets of later day loved to imitate the aham poetry of the sangham age, and two, they wished to pay their homage to *Tiruk-kōvaiyār* attributed to Māṇikkavācakar.

ULA

The next poem is the *Ulā* The first such poem was sung by Sēramān Perumāl, whose songs have been included in the 11th book of the Śaiva canon 'Seven ages of Man' said Shakespeare in the 16th century, but Sēramān said 'seven ages of Woman' in the opening years of the 8th century. The ages range from 5 to 40 Lord Śiva comes out in a procession in the streets of Tillai (Cidambaram) one evening, and all the women, namely those belonging to the seven age groups, see him and fall in love with him The poet portrays the girls, their moods and lament, and their action in a manner quite appropriate to their age The Lord Śiva is the hero here , His various attributes, His bath and dressing, His retinue and their action, are all very vividly described *Pēdai*, is a small child, age group 5 – 8, she cannot of course know what love can be The next is a lass *Pedumbai*, 8 – 13 , she is of the adolescent group, a problem age , she knows and knows not her mind , this difficulty has been well experienced by writers, and has given rise to the saying, 'to the *ulā* writer, the age of the *pedumbai* is like a tiger, the most difficult ' The other age groups are young and grown up women, who know definitely what love is The last is the *pēriḷampeṇ* aged 40,

a matronly woman, whose love of the Lord tends to be other worldly The poem is in the long continuous *kalivenbā* metre, Sēramān's poem has about 200 *kanni* or couplets, we have others running to over 700 These poems have been written not only on deities such as Muruga, Visnu, Ganapati etc, but also on patrons, men of God, and similar human personalities. A large volume of such poems has been written and they display a great revelry in the luxuries of life and in the flights of imagination Though composition in a long and simple continous narrative may tend to become monotonous and hamper the poetic expression, it is not so in fact The difference in the age group of the girls from five years to forty gives a free hand to the poet in giving a psychological treatment to the subject and often we are able to enjoy the thought and emotional content of the poem, besides the sound effect But they have gone out of date by the beginning of this century

MADAL

The first *Madal* poems were written in the 8th century by Ālvār Tirumangai and they form part of the Vaisnava canon They are known as the shorter and the longer *Tirumadal* and contain 77 and 148 couplets, strung together into a single long poem. The poem is extremely artificial in this that each has the same initial rhyming arrangement in all its 145 or 297 lines as the case may be Here a girl pining for the love of Visnu declared that if her love was not returned by Him, she would make a horse of palmyrah stalks and ride it, meaning thereby that she would immolate herself The poems are important because of their antiquity. The *madal* is a familiar love theme

in sangham poetry, where generally it is the male that offers to mount the palmyrah horse and die because of unrequitted love, *madal* for the woman has been explicitly prohibited, because it is unwomanly and immodest of her to speak openly of her love The *madal* poems of Kālamēgham and Tattuvarāyar are well known But yet, either form of the *madal* is an unusual poem in later literature

DHUTU

On the other hand, the *Dhūtu* came into existence as an independent long poem in the 14th century and immediately became popular There are now scores of such poems. The *dhūtu* is a love poem, intended to convey the message of love from the girl to the lover It is there in sangham poetry in the form of short verses where the separated lady, in a frenzy of love, sends birds and bees to go to her lover, speak of her longing, and bring him back The woman-singer is most often addressed in this manner for bringing back the hero from the battle field to his lady love The *Mēghasandēśa* of Kalidāsa is the most famous of such *dhūtu* poems in Sanskrit The first such poem in Tamil was written by Saint Umāpati Śivācārya, a Śaiva spiritual preceptor addressing his own heart to go to his master and secure his garland in token of his grace towards the pupil Later poetic convention lays down the objects which can be employed to carry the love message as ten, such as the heart, the south wind, the swan, the parrot, the cloud etc, but a host of others have also been employed by poets Umāpati's poem is called the *Nenju-vidu-dhūtu*, a *Tamil-vidu-dhūtu* (17th century) is deservedly very famous. The *dhūtu* poem like the

ulā is a single long poem in the *kalivenbā* metre, often running to 700 couplets and more. We see in these poems the most brilliant flashes of poetic conceit They had a wide popularity till the end of the last century

The *Virali-vidu-dhūtu* of recent times is a very long poem where considerable vulgarity is introduced to please the petty chief to whom the *virali* (woman singer) is sent Here poetry is subordinated to the theme of erotic love There were incessant wars among the chieftains or polygars in those days. This poem, by introducing the *virali*, a woman singer-cum-dancer to the patron, who was in those days a petty chief of the degenerate times, seeks to pander to his amorous nature These patrons were mostly uneducated, uncultured rustic men, to whom only the vulgar, the sensuous and the bizarre had the greatest appeal Their morals were not high and hence even a little gifted poet, unless he was spiritually inclined, could not help pandering to the tastes of such men The *virali arruppadai* and *dhutu*, the *kādal* and the *nondi-nātakam* are such long poems of an erotic and sensuous nature

Notes and References

1 Jesudasan A History of Tamil Literature 1960, page 188

2 There is no *pillai-Tamil* on Siva Siva is the Supreme Being and it had been the literary convention to this day not to bring down that Being to the level of a child and sing a *pillai-Tamil* poem on Him It has however been sung on Vishnu, Sakti, Vinayaka and Muruga, although these are considered the manifest forms of the Supreme The sections of the *pillai-Tamil* have occasionally been increased to even twelve, the number of verses in a section

have been reduced to five and three in the past, and even to one by the present day writers

3. Portions of the book are available as quotations in the *Iraiyanar kalaviyal* and *Kalaviyal-karikai*, *vide* edition by V Duraiswami Ayyar 1957

4 The *virali* is literally the female dancer who displays the emotions in her dance, she belonged to the *pana* caste As pointed out earlier, the *panas* had ceased to exist a long time ago, here the composer merely invokes an imaginary *virali*

5 *Vide* the section on *Pattup-pattu* page 66

MINOR POEMS – II

We have examined thus far some of the larger types among the minor poems in Tamil literature; this does not mean that they were the only important ones of the early period There are yet many more types, which though smaller in size, are even greater in importance to the scholar and to the people One feature has to be noted Tamil poetry, which sang mostly of *man* in the sangham age, gradually came to be dedicated to *God* and generally we find from the seventh century up to the end of the sixteenth, all poetry had been mostly on God, it seems to have been considered a sin to glorify man Poems like *Pāndik-kōvai*, *Nandik-kalambakam*, and *Bharani*, *Ulās* and *Pillai-Tamil* on the Chōlas, are rare exceptions

Two of the most cherished poems are the *pāvai* and *palli-elucci* These poems have been sung in the Vaisnava as well as the Śaiva canon They are considered to have great spiritual import Among the Vaisnavas, they form part of the daily prayer book

PAVAI

Tiruppāvai by Āndāl wields such an influence over the Vaisnavas, as no other work, not even Nammālvār's poems, has Nammālvār's poems are philosophical and spiritual, while Āndāl's poem is on the personal and the physical plane The *pāvai* theme has the most artistic treatment with Āndāl Perhaps it is reminiscent of a religious observance of the worship of

Krisna by the *āyar*, the cowherds' clan. Girls here gather together, very early in the morning, wake up the others in order to go to the river for a bath and the worship of Krisna They really bathe in the grace of Visnu and pray for the right husbands for themselves, and for prosperity and rains for the land The girls are all young children, they go to the house of Nandagōpa the foster-father of Krisna, wake him up, and pray to him to accept their services for ever and ever The poem of 30 verses is unexcelled for its luscious description of the morning, of nature in the cowherds' quarters and of other girls still asleep. It has endeared itself to all the Vaisnavas, women equally as men, because of the language and description and the enjoyment of the richness of life and its many pleasures which it vividly portrays The esoteric meaning of the poem is beyond the scope of our consideration here

Mānikkavācakar's poem of 20 verses, called the *Tiru embāvai*, is more austere in tone and cast differently From the beginning there is a spiritual note, one of actual surrender to God. Śiva has no child-form and so the play conception of Āndāl does not enter here There is an actual bath here and a praise of the grace of Śiva and His five-fold functions directed towards the redemption of the souls Several *pavai* poems of indifferent merit have been attempted by later writers

PALLI ELUCCI

The *palli-elucci* in both the canons is a short poem of ten verses, its theme is to wake up the Lord in order that he may bestow His grace on the mortals The concept of *Palli-elucci* is beautifully expressed by

Mānikkavācaka in one of his songs. True to his spirit of absolute surrender to God, he goes up to the Lord in his song and wakes Him up, 'My Lord of Tirup-Perumturai! What is Thy command for me today? I have come to Thee to know it, please wake up' This is the general tone of all *palli-elucci* songs The *pallāndu* again is a poem of 12 verses, a benediction on the Lord and a prayer for His continued grace on His devotees This poem in each canon was sung under dramatic situations which warrant the conferring of a benediction on God by a mortal

A *padikam* is a short poem of ten verses, generally having a common ending, sung in praise of a deity Almost all the Śaiva and Vaisnava canons consist of *padikams* This is a very simple form of poetry which continues from the fifth century to this day, it has no theme except the praise of God.

ANGA MALAI

There are a few other types which are interesting on account of the themes contained in them The *Anga mālai* of Saint Appar is one which ever has an appeal to the devotee and to the young child, it consists of twelve couplets, each is addressed to an organ of the body like the head, eye, ear, nose, heart etc, and each is called upon to bow to Him, see Him, hear His praises, think of Him, walk round His temple and so on. It is couched in a simple but interesting metre where the opening phrase occurs as a refrain of the verse and the whole poem has been a source of joy to children and very aged people alike, because of the song quality and the thought content Tirumangai wrote a poem on the same verse pattern

on a love theme[1] where the love-sick maiden calls upon the pheasant, the parrot, the *kuyil* and the others and asks each to bring her Lord to her Both the poems lend themselves easily to light singing

OTHER POEMS

Dasāngam was probably invented by Mānikkavācakar in the *venbā* metre, it is a poem of ten verses celebrating the traditional ten insignia of royalty He was a minister under a Pāndiya ruler and the appurtenances of sovereignty would easily have suggested themselves to him Here he applies them to God He has adapted many folksong motifs into his verses and they had gained immense popularity, the *ammānai, sunnam, ūsal* and *undi* may be specified as illustrations.

The *citrakavi* is of several types familiar in later day poetry, where there is a great play of words, sounds, letters and numbers, of course the sense and poetry are generally sacrificed Jñāna Sambandha young in age revels in *citrakavi*, he has sung many such poems. One is the *Elukūrrirukkai* in *ahaval*, where the numbers are built up from one to seven, each time beginning from one, going to the top, coming back to one, and again going up The praise of God runs all through His invention has been followed by half a dozen others

Mālai mārru mālai is another by Sambandha, it is a rare *citrakavi*, where the verse remains the same even when read from its last letter, in the reverse direction, all the difficulty arises only in giving out the meaning of the verse.

Many minor *prabandhas* like the *Irattai - mani - mālai* had been written even by the fifth century Variations in metre, in thought and in the number of verses had given rise to scores of poems such as the *Orupā orupatu*, *Irupā-irupatu*, *Mummanik-kōvai*, *Nānmani mālai* etc The love poem *kōvai* had variations such as the *Varukkak - kōvai* and the *Oruturaik - kōvai* Many *prabandhas* in dramatic form were written after the 16th century, like the *Kuravanji*, *Pallu* and *Nondi - nātakam*, these were seen in the section on drama. All forms of the minor poems had been sung originally as short or long poems, only in praise of the glory of God In later years, they were sung on the spiritual *guru*, still later, when political life was very uncertain, on petty local chiefs also.

We do not have any minor poem describing an object or place or event, or having any separate story content or experience. People considered no experience other than spiritual experience worth writing down. The *Kalavali-nārpatu*, one of the *Kīlk-kanakku* was written to celebrate an actual event, namely the battle between Kōccengat-chōla and the Sēra, Irum-dorai, it was written long before the Canons.

Nari viruttam of Tiru-Takkadēvar is a solitary exception of a story being narrated to teach a moral *Panca tantiram* of Vīramārttānda dēva, an adaptation from Sanskrit, is a book of short stories in verse, preaching morals to young children.

Reference

1. *Periya Tirumoli*, 10 10.

ANTHOLOGIES

Any developed language makes a compilation of selections from its authors according to the needs of the times Students of English literature may be familiar with Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* of select verses of English poetry made for the beauty and poetic value of the verses Such a scheme of compilation has been going on in Tamil Literature from the earliest period of its history We shall only briefly indicate the trends here The entire Sangham poetry is a set of compilations *Pattup-pāttu* is one of ten songs , there were certainly many more, but the compiler probably collected together only ten Similarly Ettuttohai consists of eight anthologies , *Aha nānūru*, *Narrinai* and *Kuruntohai* are anthologies of occasional verses on *aham*, *Puranānūru* on *puram* , *Paripādal* of musical pieces , *Patirrup-pàttu* is a collection of ten poems on *puram* of ten authors, each poem having ten verses in praise of one Sēra prince , *Kalittohai*, a compilation of groups of verses by five authors on the five *tinais* , and *Ainkuru-nūru* of 100 verses each by five authors The legend is that *Nāladi* itself is an anthology of 400 isolated verses.

Next in point of time are the Śaiva and the Vaisnava canon. In the latter the first and the third thousand are by several authors, while the second and the fourth are by one ālvār each, Tirumangai and Nammālvār Similarly in the Śaiva canon, the Ninth and the Eleventh Books are collections of poems by many authors.

We understand there was a grammatical treatise on *puram* by twelve authors in the 8th century, by name *Panniru patalam*, it is a grammatical anthology, so also is *Panniru pāttiyal*, a collection of verses from 15 writers on prosody and poetics, 10th century

Purattirattu, of 1570 verses, dealing with *aram*, *porul* and *inbam* on the model of *Kural*, is an anthology of verses selected from the earliest writing, chiefly with an eye towards poetic value At about the same time, two selections were made from the Śaiva *Dēvāram*, one by Umāpati, with 100 verses and another by one Agastiya with 25 poems (about 250 verses) Two other small collections had been in use from the olden days, one from *Periya purānam* having about 50 verses, and another from the entire Śaiva canon, to be used on the occasions of Siva *pūja*. *Paṭṭinattār pādal* and *Tāyumānavar pādal* are anthologies of verses which were available to the compilers of the respective authors.

The latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th witnessed the collection of many anthologies. *Tamil seyyul kalambakam* and *Pannūl tiraṭṭu*, collections from standard works, made for their didactic value, *Śaiva maniari*, a collection from standard Śaiva works made for their philosophical value; *Tanip-pādal tirattu*, a comprehensive collection of stray verses made with a view to preserving them, *Tanic-ceyyuḷ cintāmaṇi*, on the same lines but more elaborate, a selection of 1000 verses from Rāmalinga swami for use in prayers, and lastly *Perum tohai* of M Raghava Aiyangar, a very ambitious and well edited scholarly work (*aram* and *poruḷ* only), of all stray verses having

any literary value, and also of unidentified quotations from the commentators, he passed away before he could issue the second volume comprising of the part *inbam* A slender volume of a collection of verses from the inscriptions has also been made.

Vēdānta manana cintāmani is a collection of about 10,000 verses from all philosophical and religious books, numbering 227, made by Karapātra-Sivaprakāśa swami, to be of use to students of the vēdānta philosophy, it was compiled in the first decade of this century.

There have been many advaitic selections from philosophical works from the 15th century to this day. Tattuvarāyar made two such selections, *Perum-tirattu* and *Kurum-tirattu*, containing 2821 and 1340 verses respectively. He seems also to have made a much smaller compilation named *Sivānubhōgat-tirattu* containing 305 verses, taken from 73 books. *Sankara nārāyanat-tirattu* is a similar compilation, of a later period.

Two short anthologies deserve mention here; they have a peculiar characteristic, the poems contained in them had all come into existence in the 18–19 centuries. One is the *vannam* consisting of a single verse, having the equivalent of about 200 lines, distributed into four quarters, each quarter having a pendant – an arresting phrase of two or three words. The verse is mostly erotic, in praise of a shrine or a patron, it is always written in an artificial and elaborate rhythmic pattern, with a symmetric arrangement of the soft, medium or hard sounds as may be planned, having a regular beat and lilt; it was then the fashion to write such verses

and average poets prided themselves on their capacity to write such verses, they called themselves *vannak-kalanjiyam*, repository of *vannam*. There are one or two anthologies of such verses which still provide entertainment to the pedants Some modern grammarians had also written out a grammar for the *vannam*. The second half of the *vannam* was usually the lament of the mother at finding that her daughter had eloped with her lover, the first half should contain praise of a deity, praise of the gifts (of the deity or the patron), praise of the glory and victory, and praise of the city and the country of the patron.

Another type is the epistolatory verse *(sīttukkavi)* where the poet sends an epistle to his patron in verse form. The epistle in verse started with the second verse of *Kurumtohai* and the first verse of the 11th Book of the Saiva canon, both attributed to Iraiyanār (Lord Siva). But in the modern period the verse is always a long *viruttam* The first half of the verse contains the conceited boasts of the writer about himself, and the second half contains a bombastic eulogy of the patron and ends with a request that the patron supply the writer the particular object or money that he may require There is a collection of over thirty verses and it had a popularity with learners and scholars during the first quarter of this century

This gives a picture of the general trend of poetic anthologies during the last 20 centuries We have here the sangham poetry, religious poetry, grammatical collections, devotional verses, philosophical

collections, and comprehensive collections of all occasional verses. Only *Purattirattu* may be said to be a poetic anthology compiled for poetic values.

During the second quarter of this century, there lived T. K. C. (T. K. Chidambaranatha Mudaliyar), the poetic connoisseur and literary savant, who made it his mission in life to pick out brilliant poetic pieces, not only from well known literary works but also from obscure and unfamiliar works, and make them come alive, vibrating with vigour and vitality, scintillating with colour and lustre, and dancing with grace and form before the listener, illiterate or learned He was the one person who had an unfailing eye for poetry and who could keep kindred spirits enthralled by his exposition. But unfortunately he died without publishing any collection and Tamilnad is all the poorer.

THE SIDDHAS

There is quite a decent volume of Siddha literature in the Tamil language and it will therefore be worthwhile to know the Siddha poets and their writing The word *siddha* means a realised soul. Though Tirumūlar is known as a siddha, his songs have been collected into the Śaiva canon and so we are not discussing him here. The poems of the other siddhas are said to have been collected into a handy volume known as the *18 Siddhar jñana kōvai*,[1] but the volume is not real siddha poetry There are in it large sections of modern writing in prose and verse which will hardly fit in with the siddha writing. We shall therefore be content here with examining the writings of a few well-known siddhas.

SIVA VAKKIYAR

The first name to occur to the mind of any one is Śiva vākkiyar. He was a deeply religious siddha who valued most the Śiva enshrined in the heart. He was generally considered to be an iconoclast because he vehemently decried temple worship, he did so no doubt, but he said still more vehemently that man should make his heart the temple of God He had scant respect for rituals which in popular belief had become a substitute for love and service to God and to fellow beings He was a vehement opponent of

caste Almost all the siddhas believed in the oneness of all creation and they preached a philosophy of love and service and of an inward contemplation, Śiva-vākkiyar is a shining example of this faith Some of his verses have the force of a sabre thrust.

PATTINATTAR AND AVVAI

Pattinattār the siddha lived probably about the same time as Śiva vākkiyar and he too condemned material pleasures as the greatest obstacle to spiritual advancement Śiva vākkiyar had no word to say against woman, but this Pattinattār always carried on a tirade against them His one message was compassion, sharing one's food with the hungry.

It is Pattinattār who brought the highest spiritual wisdom and its emotional flight in both polished and rugged poetry to the level of the so-called masses. Till recently, there was no mendicant beggar or wandering minstrel who did not sing a dozen of his verses to the accompaniment of an one-stringed self-made harp The content of the song, the attunement of the minstrel, and his rugged harp blended, strangely enough, harmoniously with the rural setting.

Pattiragiri, according to legend, renounced a princely life on seeing the value of Pattinattār's renunciation and became his disciple He has written the *Pulambal* or Lamentations, containing 235 couplets[2], expressing his passionate longing for the realisation of God and for deliverance from sins. He always expresses here love for fellow beings and reverence for all womanhood Avvai in Tamil literature has been many, and we would consider the Avvai, who

sang *Jñānak-kural* and *Vinayakar ahaval*, a siddha Her two poems are very popular and although she is not spoken of as a siddha, she is indeed one, both by her life and by her songs

OTHERS

There have been a few more minor siddhas who have sung a few moving poems each, though couched in obscure and mystic language The name of Pāmbātti siddha, the snake charmer, is the foremost among them His song, *Ādu pāmbē*, is famous in the whole of Tamilnad today [3] He is a mystic and all his thoughts are couched in mystic language The *kundalini śakti* is the serpent which he would like to charm and cause to play Aluguni siddha is another,[4] who had only a few verses to his credit. The tone of his songs is one of lament and hence his name Aluguni, the mourner. He addresses his songs to Kannammā, and perhaps this inspired Bhārati, the modern national poet of Tamilnad, to compose his famous *Kannammā songs* Ahappēy is another, [5] the mind is the devil (*pēy*) and he addresses his songs to that mind The mind roams about without any fixed purpose, skipping from one thing to another. His songs are intended to fix it in the Śaiva spiritual path Kaduveli is yet another, [6] he is the author of the type of verse since known as the *ānandak-kalippu* He condemns all malpractices in the siddha order and laments that people do not put to proper use this mortal frame which is hard to obtain. Kutambai siddha is another very popular siddha poet,[7] who addresses his profoundly mystic songs to a child, wearing the ear ornament, *kutambai* The last important siddha is Iḍaikkāttu siddha, who hails from 'a jungle of cowherds' and

hence this name. He has couched his songs in the form of a dialogue between two cowherds tending their cows and sheep In the process of tending, milking etc., all his ideas are expressed in their words. There are a few minor siddhas of lesser importance, like the Ēnādi siddha [8]

SIDDHA WRITING

All the siddhas are a group of mystics who revolt against caste and rituals and the established order of religion They are no doubt *bhaktas* but their *bhakti* is of a different type They are very critical of the practice of religion but always hold fast to the one Supreme God and pray for His Grace. Their revolt is only in the manner of their criticism and the challenge they throw to orthodoxy. They are generally against idol worship and they emphasize the worship of God in the heart. All the siddhas have been Śaivas.

The *siddha* seems to have been a general term applied to some who wrote medical treatises also. They had attained a certain level of achievement in medicine or *siddhi*, and so are known as siddhas. Their system of indigenous medicine, when practised correctly, has been found to be quite successful.

References

1. *18 Siddhar Jnanak-kovai*, Ratna nayakar publication, 1937. 2. *Ibid* page 188 3 Page 204. 4 Page 326. 5 Page 242 6 Page 259. 7. Page 255 8 Manuscript, *vide* my History of Tamil Literature 15th century (Tamil) pages 331–3.

BALLADS AND FOLK-SONGS

BALLADS

There are many ballads in Tamil Literature and most of them are relatively very ancient Whereas in the English literature, the ballads existed first and poetry had its origin later, in the ballads and similar oral folk literature, we find in Tamil, the classical writing to have preceded such popular folk literature.

KOVALAN KATHAI

To give an example. The story of Kōvalan and Kannaki was a classical epic in the name of *Silappadhikaram* by about the 3rd century A D. In later times, a distorted version of the story of the epic came to be composed as a long ballad and it was enacted in the street open air dramas before a large gathering of rural folk It was called simply *Kōvilan kathai*, all the epic values of the original had been thrown to the winds; here we have only an avaricious prostitute, a greedy and fraudulent goldsmith, and a blood thirsty Kannaki crying for vengence.

The *Mahābhārata* had lent itself to the rise of scores of ballads, a trivial incident is taken from it and the ballad maker has easily woven round it an intricate ballad story of several thousand lines *Panca Pāndavar vanavāsam* and *Alli arasāṇi mālai* are the most famous of all such ballads.

AMMANAIP-PATTU

The terms *ammānai* and *ammānaip-pāttu* seem to have been used to denote what we know by the name of ballads. All the poems noticed here are *ammānai* poems *Ammānai* is a girls' game, played with a number of balls, perhaps these ballads were sung by women and girls, and the name *ammānai* stuck to them, as if to corroborate this idea, we find in some ballads, the term *ammānai* ending some lines or passages frequently, used as a sort of refrain *Markandēyar ammānai* is a very ancient ballad of the *purānic* type *Citraputran kathai* is a similar *purānic* ballad, still popular in the Tanjavur district. Citra-putra is the accountant of Yama, the God of Death He keeps an account of all the deeds and misdeeds of every individual and brings them up before Yama on the day of final reckoning People who offer him worship on the *Citra pournami* day, he lets off lightly.

CLASSES OF BALLADS

Ballads may be of several classes. The *purānic* ballads like the *Alli* are innumerable *Kōvalan kathai* is of the story type *Dēsingu rājan kathai* is a historical type; it combines history and legend with a new type of fast moving diction, which has caught the imagination of the people in an arresting grip The story deals mostly with the exploits of Dēsingu rājan's steed the style and diction are mostly one of gallop, which makes one get into the spirit of the narrative immediately The exploits of Kattabomman and his group had given rise to many similar historical ballads, they had only local currency and their great value is historical

TRAGEDY

Critics generally remark that the Indian literature has no tragedy, that may be true. But *Nallatangāl kathai*, a social ballad, breathes tragedy from the first line to the last Wandering minstrels, particularly women, sing this ballad in such a tragic manner, that the householder is easily tempted to give some alms. The story is about the misery caused to a lonely woman and her children, by her elder brother's wife, when out of terrible adversity she goes to his house for shelter This is a familiar theme and her name, Nallatangāl, is symbolic of the tyranny suffered by a woman at the hands of a brother's wife – the cruelty of a sister-in-law.

SOCIAL REFORM

Kapilar ahaval and *Pāyccalūrp-padikam* are two popular ballads (or perhaps folk-songs) of the 14th century, on social reform The first is a rebuke to the brahmin community by the foundling child Kapilar, when orthodox brahmins prohibited the investiture of the sacred thread on him because he was only a foundling brought up by a brahmin and his parentage unknown. Kapilar's rather lengthy poem is a powerful tirade against caste So also is the Pāyccalūr ballad, where a harijan girl launches forth a powerful attack on the brahmins who obstruct her wedding with a brahmin youth

Coming to our own times, we know *Marumakkalvali mānmiyam* of Desikavinayakam Pillai is a social ballad bringing out the tragedy of the *marumakkattāyam* law, by which inheritance is on the female line Pillai had contrived to pass it off as ancient classical ballad effectively, its impact on society was so

profound that enactment was passed in the state setting right at least some parts of the matriarchal system of inheritance in one community. Murugappa wrote a ballad, *Amirtavalli kathai,* setting forth the woes of young widows and pleading for widow re-marriage in Hindu society.

LOCAL BALLADS

Isakki kathai, Sudalaimādan kathai, Madurai Vīran kathai, Kāttavarāyan kathai, Kallalagar ammānai and a host of others are local ballads celebrating local legends and events A large number of them is popular in the Tirunelveli and Nagercoil areas; they represent a kind of hero worship *Periyannan-chinnannan* ballad of the Madras area belongs to this category.

VILLUP-PATTU

The *villup-pāttu* is another kind of ballad where, along with the singing of the ballad, many instruments, the *villu* (a large bow) in particular, are played A large volume of sound is produced which is accompanied by the loud singing of several vocally capable persons together, to attract vast audiences in days which had no electricity and no mike. These served as entertainment and relaxation to entire communities, they extended over the whole night *Villup-pāttu* had been composed on all conceivable themes – historical, *purānic,* local, social and religious themes. The modern age has witnessed the *Gandhi mahān kathai* by Kottamangalam Subbu which is gaining in popularity Subbu is able to reproduce the spirit of the folklore and folk-song in his composition.

FOLK–SONGS

Folk-songs are the legitimate birth right and legacy of any people, primitive or civilized. We have no collections of ancient folk-songs, but traces of folk-song influence are discernible in *Tolkāppiyam* and *Silappadhikāram* The *varip-pāttu* and *kuravai* in the latter are certainly modelled on folk-song and folk dance The *ammānai*, ball songs and pestle songs *(vallaip-pāttu)* found in the epic are all literary forms of the folk-songs of the period Common folk had been singing their rustic, untutored and spontaneous songs, these had a rhythm and an emotional content and music, and were suited to the action, gifted poets saw and heard these, witnessed the men and women in action, and raised them to the level of literature by adopting the same forms in their own writing As examples may be cited the *undiyār*, *sālal*, *pūvalli*, *kōttumbi* and similar songs of *Tiruvācakam* Such attempts at copying and elevating popular folk-songs had been going on through the centuries The *vallaip-pāttu* had not any specific refrain indicating the nature of the action involved, but by the 13th century, a *bharaṇi* poem employs the refrain *summēlo-summulakkāy* (*ulakkai* is the pestle) for its *vallaip-pāṭṭu*.

The siddha poems employ the folk-song patterns, particularly Pāmbātti siddha and Idaikkāttu siddha. Tattuvarāyar who lived at about the same time as these employed the largest number of popular motifs for his poems To the same period belongs *Mūvar ammānai*, which is modelled on the *ammānai* verse usually occurring in the *kalambakam* poems, where among the girls who are engaged in playing balls, one asks a clever question which is answered by a second

with another question; a third replies with a pun which answers both This kind of folk-song-cum-literary art goes on In the 19th century, Rāmalinga swāmi has employed a large number of such songs in his devotional outpourings and musical pieces.

LULLABY

The lullaby provides us with very rich folk-song material. Periyālvar perhaps wrote the first lullaby, in pure poetic form Mothers and grannies throughout the Tamil speaking areas have been coining their own lullabies, to put their babies to sleep. The loving care of the mother often bursts into natural poetry. Many editors have brought out good sized collections of such lullabies Literary parallels also exist from the old days, on light as well as heavy themes

NEW TYPES

There have been two remarkable innovations in the 19th century of the folk-song type, which had caught the imagination of the people, the learned and the masses, the moment the poems were written They are the *Kilik-kanni* and the *Kāvadic-cindu*, which are innovations both in poetic form and in presentation.

KILIK-KANNI

The *Kilik-kanni* is a folk-song type of musical piece which had great popularity in the second quarter of this country. A spiritually inclined head constable in Tirunelvēli, sang a small song of 108 couplets, by the middle of the 19th century, depicting the entreaty of a love-sick maiden to a parrot, asking it to obtain the love of Vēlan (Muruga) for her. Somehow, the yearning, the verse form, its halting movement, and

the quaint plaint contained in it brought it immediate popularity There have been many *kilik-kanni* poems by Tāyumānavar and others, but this one is in a class by itself The man had sung it in an inspired moment; no musical concert today is complete without some songs from it Bhārati himself has sung one piece on its model Other modern imitators have not been successful

KAVADIC-CINDU

The *Kāvadic-cindu* is a new type of poem invented by Annāmalai Reddi of Sennikulam in Tirunelvēli district. He was born in the second half of the 19th century He was a genius in inventing new forms and, like all geniuses, he died young, at the age of 30. He was an ardent devotee of Muruga enshrined at Kalugumalai, and he has sung besides a few minor poems, about 30 verses on Muruga, called the *Kāvadic-cindu* which have secured for him a significant place in the galaxy of the poets of the modern period. The *kāvadi* is a well known pole-like contrivance used by the devotee, particularly of Muruga, to carry his offerings of flowers, fruit and milk in a kind of basket at each end. Over the horizontal pole there is generally a semicircular arch, decorated with artistic wood work and also with plaited leaves and flowers It is balanced on the shoulder Skilled performers cause the *kāvadi* to revolve round the neck on both the shoulders, to the admiration and wonder of thousands of onlookers The *Kāvadic-cindu* was apparently written by him to enable the devotees to sing them in their often long treks to the temple Each verse is a separate poem singing the praise of Muruga, the description of the temple and His various exploits

Most are on the *aham* theme, on one or more conventional topics of this type of poetry. Here the author has invented a new type of metre, full of repetition, assonance and rhythm, which had helped the *kāvadi* carriers to sing and dance their way to the presence of their Lord at Kalugumalai. The poems had become instantly popular among all the devotees, throughout the length and breadth of the Tamilnad Illiterate men as well as educated men and women carry the *kāvadi* as part of a religious observance and the poem had helped them to overcome the tedium of the journey and the drudgery in carrying the weighty *kāvadi* on the shoulder. From literary compositions, these poems have now become almost folk-songs whose popularity is unrivalled. Many had been the author's imitators but there has been no one to equal him

The immensely popular *Kilik-kanni* and the *Kāvadic-cindu* were composed within living memory. They only go to prove that the Tamil Muse is still alive, in spite of pedantic academicians, and pulsating with life and vigour, capable of revealing herself in diverse forms and one can never predict in what form and on what subject she will reveal herself to her admirers and children in the future.

OTHER WRITING

There is yet another sector of poetic writing in Tamil which is generally not being considered in any account of Tamil literature As the volume of such writing is quite large, and as at least a part of it had been existing from an ancient past,[1] even from the 10th century onwards, we are very reluctant to ignore it, we shall here make just a passing reference to it Like every other class of writing in Tamil, much of this sector also has been lost through neglect

We have observed elsewhere that all worth-while writing was done in the form of verse by the ancient thinkers Besides the subjects so far discussed, such as grammar, music, drama, epics, devotional poetry, philosophy and religion, the thinkers had also bestowed their attention on many other subjects Architecture, astrology, alchemy, chemistry, mathematics, medicine, veterinary science and many others had claimed their attention Under medicine we find books on such branches as pædiatrics, toxicology, surgery and ophthalmology, and on pulse reading, on diseases of the lungs and the skin, and on diabetes, leprosy, fevers etc.

An old verse bemoans the fact that many valuable books on several subjects had been swallowed up by the sea when it made incursions into the land on the coasts of Tamilnad; the subjects of such books

mentioned therein are academic subjects such as logic, prosody and economics, philosophical subjects such as *yoga* and concentration, arts such as painting and music, sciences such as mathematics, geology and metallurgy, quasi-sciences such as alchemy and water-divining, black arts like magic, the art of paralysing another and the art of causing another's death by incantation, and warfare

The writers often assume such names as Agastiya, Bhōga, Dhanvantri and Tirumūlar The body of their writing is very vast They gain weight when one or another of them is quoted by some of the ancient literary commentators like Adiyārkku nallār and Naccinārkkiniyar

Jinēndramālai,[2] a book on astrology, and *Kanānūl*,[3] a book on dreams, both quoted by the *Silappadhikāram* commentators, are fully available today. So also is *Siddhar-ārūdam*,[4] a book on toxicology, and *Kanakkadhikāram*,[5] a book on mathematics, are available in print *Drēkkānam*,[6] an astrological treatise of the 10th century is lost, but another of the 12th century, *Ullamudaiyān*[7] is available Many books of Tēraiyar, a brain surgeon, are available There were books for treating not only cattle diseases, but also the diseases of horses and of elephants, (this is understandable, because in the Tamilnad of a thousand years ago, the ruling princes had divisions of cavalry and of elephants,) these books have not yet been printed

There has been a book on painting, mentioned in the *Silappadhikāram* commentary,[8] but the book is not available. A Pandiya prince wrote a book on

the science of erotics[9] There was also a book on chess[10] A large number of books on the various branches of medicine are still available in print and in manuscript

There seem to have been books on gem evaluation, on safeguards against stealing,[11] books on soothsaying by reference to the quivering in parts of the body and on palmistry are available today. No aspect of human life or activity has been left untouched by the writers Those books may not be real literature, they are just mentioned here to show the variety, range and antiquity of this class of writing.

References

1 *Vide* my History 10th century, page 365 – Table.

2. *Jinendramalai*, quoted by the earlier commentator on *Silappadhikaram* page 443, 1927 edition, *Aycciyar kuravai*, and by Naccinarkkiniyar on *Cintamani*

3 Adiyarkku nallar quotes four verses from the *Kana-nul Adaikkalak-kathai*, lines 25, 106, *Kana-nul* is published by the Madurai Tamil Sangham in 1920 (II edition)

4 *Siddhar-arudam*, published by Gurusamik-konar in 1916 • mentioned by Naccinarkkiniyar in his commentary on *Cintamani*, verse 1287, Swaminatha Ayyar's edition.

5 Printed in 1872 in the Vivekavilakkam press

6 Quoted by *Yapparunkala virutti olipiyal*, *vide* pages 552-555, my History of Tamil Literature, 10th century.

7 *Vide* my History 11th century, pages 455-6

8 *Ibid* pages 369-70, Adiyarkku nallar on *Venil-kathai*, line 25 On the other hand, all the artisans had written their manuals on sculpture in the Sanskrit language

9 *Kokkoham* by Varatungarama Pandiya, printed 19th c Naccinarkkiniyar mentions a *Kamanul Cintamani* 2700

10 Published in the pages of the *Sen-Tamil*, Madurai

11 *Vide* the commentaries on line 634 of *Maduraik-kanji*, and line 166 of *Silappadhikaram*, *Kolaikkalak-kathai*.

CHRISTIAN WRITERS

Christian missionaries followed in the footsteps of the conquering European armies into all parts of India They had the authority of the army behind them in their conversion The ecclesiastical department of the British Indian Government maintained them Given funds and force, their conversion work grew apace and to aid them in their work, they introduced printing and a simplified manner of Tamil prose writing. It should be remembered that the ecclesiastical department was itself maintained by the India Government's budget

FOREIGN WRITERS

De Nobili, the Italian Jesuit Missionary, was perhaps the first important introducer of Tamil prose, of course solely with the proselytizing purpose. He wrote many simple Christian dialectical manuals

Next came Beschi, who adopted the Tamil name Vīramā munivar He lived in the early part of the 18th century in the Tirunelvēli district. All his work was motivated by the proselytizing zeal. Supradīpa kavirāyar was a gifted poet of the period, who first enjoyed the patronage of the Nilakkōttai zamindar and then of the Ariyalūr Maḷavarāyar. When the fortunes of the latter were at a low ebb, he had to leave him. By then he had become not only old and destitute, but also blind. Beschi took him over as his teacher,

extended his patronage to him and made him, an instrument for all his literary activities and for the production of his proselytizational literature. As Supradīpa had no one to look after him, Beschi's offer was a godsend to him All the works that go by the name of Beschi were the works of Supradīpa. *Tēmbavani*, *Catur aharādi*, *Tonnūl Vilakkam*, *Paripūrana gurukathai* and a host of others were all the work of Supradīpa.

It was quite normal in those days for a poet to issue his work in the name of his patron The suggestion for each book might have been Beschi's, but the entire work in each case was Supradīpa's Poor and helpless, handicapped by his blindness, and absolutely broken down by infirmity, he did all the work out of gratitude to the man who helped him to pass his last days as a decent human being The poet was a genius in torment physically, economically and intellectually, and so he jumped at the idea, when he was offered relief and peace on all these counts It should be remembered that no foreigner could grasp the thoughts that go into the making of *Catur aharādi* or *Tonnūl Vilakkam* Even a Tamilian scholar of average intelligence could not have made them; only a genius like the blind poet was a match for them

The next great contribution to the world of Tamil thought in language and grammar came from Caldwell, another missionary practising in Tirunelvēli In spite of its many faults, his book of Comparative Dravidian Philology in English is a very important piece of constructive analytical work. He has also

written one or two Christian tracts G U Pope, the translator of *Tiruvācakam*, *Kural* and *Nāladi* is the next important figure He was so much moved by the poetic expression and self-surrender of Mānikkavācakar that he took immense pains to introduce him to the English reader His translation of this book as well as of *Kural*, *Nāladi* and some portions of *Pura nanūru* are classics of early attempts by foreigners to fathom the poetic, ethical and devotional expressions of the Tamilians In his introduction to *Tiruvācakam*, he has also translated *Tiru-arul-payan* of Umāpati, which is a Śaiva scripture Without any fear of contradiction we may say that the greatest service to the cause of Tamil and also of the Śaiva religion was rendered by this one man, who caused the words 'Here lies a student of Tamil' to be engraved over his grave

The list of contributions from foreigners will not be complete without a mention of Winslow In the middle of the 19th century, he compiled a Tamil-English dictionary, with the help of several illustrious Tamil scholars It is a very large volume and gives many familiar Tamil phrases and their English equivalents It was a good attempt at recording many a colloquial expression, and in this respect it was a great help to the modern Tamil lexicon. The Tamil phrases of Winslow were, however, omitted in the lexicon.

TAMILIANS

Two Tamilian writers require special mention here The first is Vedanayakam pillai, Munsif at Mayuram and an ardent admirer of Minakshisundaram pillai. Though he wrote many sectarian poems, he is

now remembered chiefly for three works of a non-sectarian character His prose work *Pratāpa Mudaliyār Caritram* is a novel, modelled on the English works, but it was written more as a *prose-purāna*, its importance lies only in its prose style His *Nītinūl* is a didactic work on the model of such books of the early years, but it has never had any currency His *Sarva samaya samarasa kīrttanai*, musical pieces on the model of the masters of the period, is a brave attempt at preaching universal ethics and piety through music But he strives for rhyme and alliteration and the pieces do not possess the least emotional content or lyrical quality.

The other writer is Krishna pillai, who was a good scholar in all Tamil literature and grammar. At the age of thirty he turned Christian and translated Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* into Tamil He came of an orthodox Vaisnava sect and was a good versifier, but he was a soul in torment materially, and so spat out such venom against the Vaisnava cult which is rarely to be met with elsewhere.

MUSLIM WRITERS

The Muslims in Tamilnad had not come from Arabia they had embraced Islam recently or some generations back, when the Muslims invaded this part of the country and made their conversions at the point of the sword They are all Tamilians and naturally, the gifted among them could produce literature, given the occasion and the urge Many of them had been pupils under illustrious Tamil men of letters of the period and had bloomed in time into men of letters, themselves Umaruppulavar wrote *Sīrāp-purānam*, giving the life of prophet Mohammed on an epic scale in the 17th century under the patronage of Sīdakkādi a muslim patron of letters It is a very large work running to over five thousand verses He left it incomplete it was completed by a later writer The poet had never left the shores of the Pāndiya coast and so he had no vision of the Arabian desert His Mecca and Arabia are all copies of the Pāndiyan territory.

Several versifiers had tried their hand at didactic writing Nainar labbai Alim is one such. He wrote *Svarganīti*, running to 33 verses, in close imitation of *Ulaganīti*, a later didactic poem, which used to be popular among primary school children in the past. This poem preaches universally acceptable codes of

conduct, concluding each verse with an exhortation to the heart 'to praise the husband of Katija'. The same author's *Adaikkala mālai* of 50 verses, surrendering himself to Allah, is a good string of verses, modelled on the *Adaikkalap-pattu* of *Tiruvācakam* Mohammed Hussain wrote the *Penbuddhi Mālai*, prescribing a code of conduct for women.

Many Muslim writers had written about the wars waged by the prophet and his followers, in long verses of the ballad type. They were all written by about the end of the 18th century. Some of them are long poems, running to over 800 couplets. As an example may be cited the *Ibn-iyantan-padaippōr* written by Aliyār-pulavar son of Kanda pillai in 1830 and printed in 1893.

Mohaiddin purānam by Mohammed Ibrahim (called Vannak-kalañjiyap-pulavar) earned for him recognition and vast material benefits besides. One Shihabuddin wrote the sayings of the prophet in about 1200 verses, towards the close of the 17th century. Javvādup-pulavar was a popular writer who wrote many *vannams* and similar difficult verses. Labbai alim had sung many *Tiruppuhal* verses on the prophet.

There was a recluse muslim in Madras by the opening years of the 20th century, known by the name Mastan Sahib of Gunamkudi. He has written more than 1000 verses, long and short, craving for the grace of Mohammed as the *guru* He had read very widely in the spiritual and devotional writings in Tamilnad,

particularly those of Tāyumānavar, and naturally his songs reflect the form, terminology and thought-modes of that saint His songs were popular among a certain class of people in the opening decades of this century.

Thus it may be seen that the gifted and capable Tamil muslims had tried their hand at the various branches of Tamil writing But taken together, there does not seem to be any great contribution from them towards the advancement of the language or its literature, they have no doubt been responsible for the infiltration of many Arabic and Urdu words into the written language.

THE POETS

A few lines about the poets in general may not be out of place in this short survey Later literary tradition makes out the poets to be of four categories ; the *kavi* – the poet who can sing poems of the four distinct categories, the *gamaka* – he who can expound well even unfamiliar poetry before an audience of eminent scholars, the *vāti* – he who can firmly establish his own views after refuting alien thoughts, and the *vākki* – he who can skilfully write poems on all the four goals of life. The *kavi* of the four categories is *āsu kavi* – he who can compose extempore verses on any subject under any conditions, *madhura kavi* – he who can compose poems in sweet and mellifluous language, *citra kavi* – he who can compose poems with intricate letter, sound or word arrangements, and *vittāra kavi* – he who can compose elaborate and long poems. This sort of elaboration has been adapted in Tamil poetics from the 9th century

The Sangham poetry and the early epics had not known this classification. By their own standards, we may say that the sangham poems were perhaps all of the *madhura kavi* type , the other three types were not known then. We have been having *vittāra kavi* and *citra kavi* definitely from the seventh century ; but the concept of *āsu kavi* had taken shape only later, with the advent of Kāḷamēgham.

When we survey the galaxy of the men of letters of the period of two thousand years, we find there the representatives of all classes of society Princes had been writers in the sangham age, such as Neduñceliyan, Perum-kadumkō, in the later period such as Sēramān perumāl, Kulasēkhara, Gandarāditta, still later like the Tenkāśi Pāndiya family, queens such as the Queen of Bhūta pāndiya. The earlier chapters have shown that they hailed from all the religious creeds, the Śaiva and the Vaisnava, the Jaina and the Buddha, the Christian and the Muslim. Most have been householders but we also have ascetics like Ilangō, Tiru Takka dēvar and Sivaprakāśa swami. All have been theistic writers but there were also iconoclasts like some Siddhas The common belief is that poets had been poor, but the names of the princely poets, and the list of court poets like Jayamkondār, Ottakkūttar, Sēkkilār and many others, belies this statement. Some there have been who decried woman but the general run of poets had not been so. Many had been hunters and warriors as well who had sung great poetry, gipsies had written poetry According to tradition, very young persons also had written poetry There have been instances where the father and the son had been poets We find here persons from all classes, the merchants, princes, ministers, doctors, and brahmins. Women from all classes also take a legitimate share in the writing

Many poets who lived at different times appear to have borne the same name – such as Agastya, Avvai, Kapila, Parana, Nakkīra, Perum dēva, Kallāda and Pērāsiriyar.

Social or physical handicaps had never hindered the writing of poetry and the recognition of its greatness Tiruppānālvar in the Vaisnava canon and Sēndanār in the Saiva canon, both harijans, have written wonderful devotional poetry Vilāncōlaip-pillai, a harijan, wrote a short philosophical treatise; he is today an acārya in the southern sect of Vaisnavism and his poem of seven verses forms part of the *Tenkalai* Vaisnava prayer book These come from the lowest castes.

The Irattaiyar tradition is one of a lame poet and a blind poet moving about in the country, one aiding the other and singing duets as occasional verses and as devotional poems. Mudat-Tāmakkanni and Mudat-Tirumāran were perhaps lame, hence the prefix *muda* (lame). Mudat-Tāmakkanni was a woman and the other a prince of the Pāndiya dynasty Muda-mōsiyār and Aiyūr Mudavanār were also poets who were lame. Mōsiyār had sung the short beautiful verse on Āy 'Āy is not the businessman who trades good deeds in this birth for a better deal in the next; he follows the righteous path only because all noble souls before had gone that path.'

A classic instance is Antahak-kavi Vīrarāghava, the blind poet, who had written many good minor poems, he says of himself that he wrote billions of pages not on palm leaves but on the 'leaf of his heart' and studied them Talaimalai kanda dēva, author of *Marudūr antāḍi*, was also a blind poet An equally well known poet of the next century was Supradīpa kavirāya who wrote hundreds of pages in various fields, for the sake of his benefactor Beschi. Māmbaḷak-kavi

was another blind poet who had written many minor poems. He lived in the middle of the 19th century and was patronised by many local chiefs His songs were so much liked that he was given the title *Kavi-singam*, Lion among poets. In our own times, Asalāmbikai ammai wrote thousands of her verses, metrical biographies of Gandhi, Tilak and Ramalinga, even when she was struck down with a dire disease We know Desikavinayakam pillai wrote some of his sweet poems, when he was being consumed by an ugly and virulant form of eczema

There are some oft repeated legends regarding poets, and untrue though they are, we would like to mention them if only for the sake of their popularity. It is doubtful if they reflect any credit on the poets concerned, we do not mean the legends are true. One is associated with Nakkīrar and the second verse of Kuruntohai. A Pāndiya prince had a doubt in his mind whether the fragrance emanating from the tresses of his queen was natural to them or whether it came from the flowers she wore He announced that he would award a purse of gold to the person who could read his mind and give him the correct answer. Of course no one could do it There was a poor brahmin devotee of Śiva who had prayed to Him for some gold for his marriage expenses Śiva of Madurai gave him this verse to be shown to the Prince. The Prince was satisfied and so gave the award to the poor man. But the head poet of the Madurai Sangham, Nakkīrar, stopped him saying that the human hair had no fragrance apart from that of the flowers worn on it. Śiva appeared before him as the poet, the

author of the verse; yet Nakkīrar did not yield. When the poet showed his true form as Śiva, Nakkīrar still did not go back on his position Though he incurred the wrath of Śiva, he would not yield This incident has made the story a great legend to show that a man of letters in Tamil could never be intimidated.

Another story is about inferior poets. It says that a high standard in Tamil poetry was maintained and when false poets came up with their inferior writing, Pillaip-Pāndiya (probably Ativīrarāma) knocked him on the head, Villiputtūrar scooped up his ears and cut off his tongue, Ottakkūttar tied up the tufts of such poets in pairs and cut off their heads.

The fiction about Śittalai Sāttanār is equally well known He was said to be a poet of a high order with a sensitive ear to poetry, whenever he heard false poetry, he used to knock on his own head with his stylus, this caused a puss-infested wound on his head which did not heal, because there was always such bad poetry Only when he heard *Kural*, he did not knock on his head, and then the wound had time to heal This story finds a place in *Tiruvalluva malai* of the 11th century The term Sīttalai, in the name of this poet, is said to mean puss-headed, but unfortunately, it is the name of his village The whole story is mere myth

There are still more such stories and they all do not redound to the credit of the Tamil Muse.

Popularity which some poets of the past had enjoyed not only with learned people but also with semi-literates, is something which is really unaccountable As an instance, we may mention Avvai, Kālamēgham and Irattaiyar. Avvai of course was a great poet who had endeared herself to people of all age groups and at all social levels, by her pithy songs ; her popularity is understandable But the popularity of the others stands on a different footing These were not great poets of the calibre of Avvai, who could give expression to the wisdom of the ages – wisdom which can help mankind for all time. But they were masters of words, of pun, assonance and rhyme, and a trick of words and a twist of expression, which made them capable of breathing hot and cold in the same breath, of touching the most ludicrous and voicing the most sublime in the same set of words. This skill had made their verses enjoyable for all people.

WOMEN POETS

In the world of letters predominated by the male species, it may indeed be of interest to assess the achievements of the female We have of course the story of Kannaki, the meek and aggrieved heroine of Puhār, who became a violent fighter in Madurai on the unjust execution of her husband, and burnt that city, went west and became a celestial in Vanji This is mere story, it is not fact nor history So also is the story of Manimēkhalai, Kundalakēsi, Nīlakēśi and a host of others These were not writers The illustrious Pandiya Queen Mangaiyarkk-arasi, a historical figure, is celebrated in legend and history, but is not a writer

THE SANGHAM PERIOD

We have indeed poetesses hailing from the earliest period from which poetry is available to us now. Thirtytwo women poets are said to have sung poems in the four anthologies, *Aha nānūru, Kuruntohai* and *Nārrinai* (on love) and *Purananūru* (on peace and war) Several have been given the title the good, such as Nap-pasalai, Nak-kannai, Nac-cellai (*na* is the prefix for the good) There had been two women poets having the name Kākkai-pādini the Elder and the Younger, and both had written grammatical treatises on poetics. The poems of several of these women poets are found in all the anthologies. The foremost

is of course Avvai, the relentless old bard who does not spare prince or peasant, but still is sought after by all Her songs here number 59 Her poems on the theme of love mostly deal with the pangs of separation She had great affection for the petty chief Adhikan and her songs, sung when she was sent as an ambassador to the other princes' courts by Adhikan, strike terror into the hearts of the enemies We still wonder how a woman, and an old woman at that, could sing such power-laden war songs, which swing and deal hammer-like blows

Special mention may be made of Mudat-Tāmak-kanni, who sang *Porunar-ārruppadai*, on King Karikāla, and Kākkai-pādini Nac-cellai who sang ten verses on Prince Adukōtpāttu Sēralāda, who presented her with nine weights of gold for making trinkets and one hundred thousand gold coins besides

Not less important are a few women poets, who are gems in their own right The poem sung by the widow of Prince Bhūta Pāndiya, sung at the time of his funeral, when the courtiers tried to dissuade her from giving up her life on her husband's death, are like tongues of fire, lapping up all those that come near, in her biting sarcasm against a life of widowhood Okkūr Māsātti, Ponmudi and Kāval pendu have sung poems of heroism and valour about which any son and any nation can be proud High placed daughters of the patron Pāri and some low placed gipsy clan women have also sung sweet songs

THE CANONS

We mentioned Mangaiyarkk-arasi, a canonised saint but not a poet. But Karaikkāl ammai, a canonised

saint was also a poet Her songs form part of the Śaiva canon She lived some centuries earlier than Appar and Sambandha, and her songs are not only sweet and elegant poetry, but express the perennial philosophy of love and service to God. Her love of God is simply the fond expression of the child's love to its mother "I long to bow before my Lord and perform manual service to him I shall not accept even if the worlds are gifted to me I am proud because I have the good fortune to bow before Śiva, and place floral offerings at His feet, and praise His devotees and be His slave" Love of fellow beings is a refreshing message from Ammai's songs having great significance to the modern world.

Equally important are the songs of Āndāl from the Vaisnava canon She is even considered to be the greatest woman poet and saint Her songs are really the love songs of a woman pining for the love of God and for union with him The love-sick maiden Āndāl performs in her songs a detailed worship for Manmata, the god of love Her description of her wedding with her Lord in a dream is unique in Tamil, and is most moving Her *Tiruppāvai* song, depicting the bathing of a group of virgins in the month of *Mārgali*, praying for suitable grooms for themselves, and for rain and prosperity for the land, is deservedly considered her greatest contribution to Tamil poetry. Her songs have influenced the Tamil people profoundly and still continue to do so. This theme has also been utilised by Saint Manikkavacakar Service to God is the one keynote of the songs The *pāvai* song has travelled to distant Siam (Thailand) beyond the seas by the Tamil settlers there and is still sung there as part of a religious rite.

THE LATER PERIOD

There have been many poetesses of the name of Avvai in different periods One such is more well known than the Avvai mentioned earlier and she is the most popular even among the unlettered masses. She is the reputed author of the several ethical works *Āttisūdi*, *Konraivēndan*, *Mūdurai* and *Nalvali* Most of her sayings have passed into the popular folk-lore of the Tamil people. Not only was she a great poetess but she was the one unequalled and unrivalled poet of the masses All unlettered village folk, men and women, daily utter a number of her sayings in the course of their ordinary business. She always says simple things like revere your mother and father as God, worship in the temple, obey your elders, learn while you are young, speak with humility even to the lowly, extend help to your kin, do not expose your weakness even to your best friend, think well before you act, not killing is the best penance, the best food is that obtained through one's own labour, always pray to God, do not be idle, banish pettiness, remove ignorance, and do not rob a public trust All these have been uttered by her in the simplest yet most poetic form, in two words or four words. Her poetry and her philosophy of life, though of the highest in expression and the most broad-based in life, is yet bound up with the normal experiences of the average man, woman and child, hence their eternal appeal to the mass mind The whole of *Nalvali* is concerned with the higher reaches of philosophy, but yet is expressed in a manner intelligible to the common man.

The unusual brilliance of this Avvai has in a sense completely shut out poetry from womankind and we may say that after her there have been no women poets at all Jain nuns known to commentators as Kaunti have tried their hand at introducing interpollations in classics like *Parīpādal* and *Cintāmani* There was one Ammaicci much later who crossed swords with Andakak-kavi Vīrarāghavar There was also the Queen of Prince Varatungarāma Pāndiya who rebuked Ativīrarama's *Naidatam* In the 20th century we had Asalāmbikai Ammai, who was a gifted and prolific writer. Decades earlier she had written metrical biographies of Ramalinga swami, Tilak and Gandhi, called *Ramalinga Purānam*, *Tilakar Purānam* and *Gandhi Purānam*, but because of the political turmoils in the Tamilnad, she had not received the recognition that was her due. Yet we do not come across any outstanding woman poet in later literature.

TAMIL PROSE

Prose is the form of the natural expression of thought by beings who have been endowed with the gift of speech Language is an instrument for communicating the thought of one human being to another When man first acquired this instrument, he spoke as thoughts arose in his mind, to the extent it was possible for him to translate them into words Gradually, as society developed and as his thinking and expressing faculties expanded, beauty was added to speech and this resulted in artistic expression , this was poetry Beautiful thoughts can be expressed by any one, given the urge and the feeling , but to give them a form, training and culture are necessary Poetry is not mere word, nor mere thoughts . it is the best thought, in the most suitable words, and given the most beautiful form , it is form that makes poetry.

WHY POETRY

Early man did not feel any need to write down anything. Only when artistic expression was developed, the composer of that expression, poetry, desired to write it down. Writing was difficult In the old days, palmyrah leaf had to be prepared and the matter had to be written on it with a steel stylus. This difficulty of writing necessitated only valuable matter to be written down Hence whatever was considered valuable was given a poetic form and

written down Besides, the work involved in opening a manuscript book and in tying it up, made people commit to memory all valuable things written down; the written word in the book served only as a source of refreshing the memory or of reference. Prose was not easy to memorise and hence we find there was no prose material written down There was no systematic work, small or big, in prose, that was written down.

EARLY PROSE

The passages of a few lines in the *Silappadhikāram* which we find in the name of *katturai* or *uraippāttu madai*[1] is also a form of rhythmic writing, having the usual poetic features of alliteration, assonance and rhyme, it is not called poetry, because it does not have the measured rigidity of the poetic lines Such passages cannot be said to be prose, they are not renderings of the language as it was spoken The language of the commentaries on grammar and literature is perhaps the first specimen of prose, the language as it was spoken, it may be simple or involved, it may be quite a natural style or may be ornamental, but yet it is prose, because the writer wants to convey some thought in a direct manner. The first such prose writing is the *Iraiyanār kalaviyal* commentary[2] It is a very ornate prose, but yet it is prose indeed

The fragment of *Perundēvanār Bhāratam*[3] as we have it today contains prose passages strewn between verses, to serve the purpose of continuity in the story, they are no doubt an integral part of the book But the author here makes profuse use of Sanskrit and the whole reminds us today of the *kathā kālaksēpam*[4] form of narrative.

COMMENTARIES

Two early writers who used simple prose in their commentaries are Ilampūranar and Mānakkudavar Their commentaries on *Tolkāppiyam*[5] and *Kural*[6] are always in easy simple style They generally write in short sentences and do not employ any involved construction They do not exclude Sanskrit words, but their number is limited. The writing is always clear and to the point, without any flashes or figures The other commentators worth mentioning are the writer of *Yāpparunkala viruttı*,[7] Adiyārkku nallār[8], Perun-dēvanār *(Vīrasōliyam)*,[9] Parimēlalagar[10], Sēnāvaraiyar,[11] Pērāsiriyar and Naccinārkkiniyar[12] Of these, the first three writers are fully engrossed with their subject, they have so much to tell, that they have no time to pause to embellish their writing Often Adiyārkku nallār uses some assonance, but mostly, his style is a dignified and direct style Parimēlalagar often brings to bear his vast erudition on his writing which occasionally gets padded and involved The other three are commentators on *Tolkāppiyam.* The very nature of their writing does not permit them to be anything but lucid and effective Sēnāvaraiyar is often descriptive Naccinārkkiniyar is an ocean of scholarship which is reflected in his writing His style is neither ornate nor simple but yet elegant and lucid.

MANIPRAVALA

Contemporaneous with these writers, there was another school of commentary writers who had carved out an altogether new path for themselves They are the Vaisnava *vyākhyāna* writers From the days of Rāmānuja down to the days of Manavāla-mā-munigal, there have been a score of writers who wrote many

glosses on the Vaisnava canon. The first such writer was Tiruk-kurugaip-pirān Pillān [13], who wrote his gloss, the *Ārāyirappadi*, on Nammālvār's *Tiruvāymoli* Here, the sentence construction was no doubt Tamil, but most of the religious terms, nominal inflexions and phrases were completely Sanskrit The characteristic of the writing is an expression of poetic appreciation; it also served as a vehicle for the conveyance of philosophic thought The writers like him thought and breathed Sanskrit, though their nourishing ground was Nammālvār's Tamil, and hence their language. It acquired a special name the *manipravāla*, gem and coral Pillān's *Ārayirappadi* (six thousand) was the fore-runner of this school which reached its consummation in the 36 thousand of Nampillai, written down by Vadakku Tiruvīdip-pillai [14] In manuscripts and printed texts, the Sanskrit words and letters are printed in the *grantha* character, hence one not familiar with Sanskrit and with the *grantha* script, cannot even read it, let alone understand, and what is worse, the early publishers of these commentaries, financed by pious Telugu knowing Vaisnavas around Madras, printed the Sanskrit words in the Telugu script, with the result that a non-Telugu script knowing Tamil scholar can hardly even decipher the *vyākhyāna* !

Certain classes of chettis and others who had settled in Madras some centuries back were very ardent followers of the Rāmānuja cult They understood the Tamil language but did not know the Tamil script. So they had the entire Nalāyiram and the whole range of its commentaries and allied literature written by the Vaisnava ācāryas which was in *manipravāla* printed in the Telugu script, and used it for their reading But

for their printing in the Telugu script, it is quite likely some of the *manipravāla* Vaisnava works would have been lost Even today, some of those books are available only in the Telugu script, they had not been printed in the Tamil script

Some call the grantha script the *gīrvana* (literally the language of the gods), the term however is understood to apply generally to the language and not to the script

The *manipravāla* was taken up by the Jain writers who always desired to exhibit a flair for Sanskrit *Jīva sambhōdanai*[15], a Jain philosophic work written in prose and *venbā* verse, employs the *manipravāla* for the prose portion and in this it does not lag behind the Vaisnava writers The second is *Sri Purāna*[16], a large and valued scriptural text of the Jains, written wholly in the manipravāla style It is perhaps the only large complete prose work, outside the field of commentaries The Śaivas never attempted this style excepting the solitary instance of Śivāgra Yōgi's *Siddhiyār* commentary[17] of a later date

SAIVA WRITERS

Prose writing now enters another phase in its evolution Unlike the Vaisnava writers, the Śaiva *śastra* commentators had employed from the very early period (14th century) a clear and simple style to expound their philosophy There have also been a score of such writers who had written both commentaries and critical works These commentary writers are so numerous and are such great personalities that it is not possible to single out any for special mention.

Yet we shall mention one Sivajñāna swami, a great figure in later Śaiva dialectics is one such. He wrote many prose works and commentaries, he always employed a very hard style using archaic forms, a stinging sarcasm and a biting humour His works were generally characterised by a violent attack on the alien schools and his language consequently is very pungent and biting But generally, all these Śaiva writings are characterised by lucidity and a logical forcefulness, while being dialectical also The difference in style between the Vaisnavas and the Śaivas is also explainable from the fact that the Vaisnava writers were all Sri Vaisnava brahmins, while the Śaiva writers were all Śaiva velālas, hence the preponderance of the Sanskrit element in the former

PRINTING

With the advent of the proselytizing work of the Christian missionaries and of the printing machine, Tamil prose again enters an altogether different phase in its history Prose was employed by them in printing their tracts for religious conversion and from then on modern Tamil prose began to take root The Jesuit writers of those days secured the aid of indigent Tamil poets and flooded the land with plenty of printed prose material In time, printing found its way into non-Christian quarters also and we find here the beginnings of modern Tamil prose

THE 19th CENTURY

We now come to the 19th century, a period of abundant literary production in all spheres – prose, poetry, grammar, lexicon, musical pieces, drama and opera, journalistic writing, devotional poems, purānas

other minor poems, essays and even story writing Naturally prose played a large part in the creative activity of the period. Tāndavarāya mudaliyār, author of *Pancatantram*[18] (prose) is the first important figure Although he can write an easy and picturesque style, his sentences and construction are long drawn out Vīrāsami Cettiyār is remembered by his *Vinōda rasa manjari*[19] containing many funny *(vinōda)* stories about some very eminent men of letters of the last one thousand years, like Kambar Unfortunately, Tamil critics and research workers had forgotten that his book never professed to be factually true but only aimed at being funny, at providing entertainment Rāmalinga swāmi, author of thousands of devotional verses, had written a few prose works like *Manumurai kanda vācakam* and *Jīvakārunya olukkam* (the path of compassion)[20] He employs innumerable proverbs and, although his language is simple, he is often verbose and goes on padding his thoughts merely for the sound effect

ARUMUKHA NAVALAR

With relief we turn to Ārumukha Nāvalar, rightly hailed as the father of modern prose. He wrote on ethical and religious subjects and has presented many lengthy purānas in easy readable elegant Tamil. The most famous are the prose versions of *Kanda purāna, Periya purāna* and *Tiruvilaiyadal purāna*[21]. He also wrote four graded readers wherein he laid down codes of ethical conduct for school going children. In the middle class families in South India, he was quite a powerful force upto the first quarter of the present century. His writing was always easy and elegant, direct and lucid, but there was such a compelling urge

and urgency in it that the unsophisticated householder of those days could not but act as he directed, so far as a personal moral code was concerned.

NAMASIVAYA MUDALIYAR

With Ārumukha Nāvalar, prose had come into its own and we now close the 19th century and enter upon the present The one man who should be remembered with gratitude by the Tamilians for releasing the Tamil muse from her fetters, in the matter of prose in the 20th century is Namaśivāya mudaliyār He was a pandit in a girls' college, and moving with young girls had conditioned his writing He made his style always direct, simple and not verbose, elegant but not flowery, rich but not ornate His thoughts were simple and he employed a simple and forceful style to convey them to young minds He had always something to say, he said it and stopped Even today his school books[22] are models of good Tamil prose Men and women, who are today past sixty years, may be able to recall the joy they derived from studying his class readers in school.

It should be remembered that we are not singling out Nāvalar and Mudaliyār as the only writers of good Tamil prose Many could certainly have written good prose during their days We are not, however, concerned here with all good prose , rather we desire to point out the unique prose writers whose writing had influenced and shaped later prose writing most It is our conviction that these two, during their respective periods and in their fields, were the greatest moulders of prose which served as a model for all future prose writing.

Pet likes and dislikes and aversions are so very pronounced these days, not only because of personal preferences, but mostly because of political regimentation, a diehard conservatism, an ugly scramble for the crumbs thrown out by educational bodies in the form of selection of books, and similar other extraneous causes We would therefore refrain from commenting upon the 20th century writing altogether [83]

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2 *Iraiyanar Ahapporul,* C R Namasivaya Mudaliyar

3. Perundevanar *Bharata venba,* edited by A Gopala Aiyar 1925

4 *Katha kalakshepam* - religious discourse given out with music before a large audience.

5 *Tolkappiyam Ilampuranam,* V O Chidambaram Pillai, Eluttu 1927, Porul 1936

6. *Tirukkural, Manakkudavar* urai, Ponnuswami Nattar edition 1925

7 *Yapparungalam,* edited by Bhavanandam pillai 1916

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11. *Tolkappiyam Solladhikaram, Senavaraiyam,* Damodaram pillai's edition 1886

12 *Tolkappiyam Porul adhikaram,* Kanakasabhapati pillai's edition 1934–35.

13 The *Arayirappadi* of Pillan in *Bhagavat vishayam*.

14 The *Idu* in *Bhagavat Vishayam*

15 *Jiva sambhodanai*, Purnacandra sastri 1957

16 *Sri Puranam* edited by Venkatarajulu Reddiyar, University of Madras 1943.

17 *Siddhiyar*, *Aruvar Urai* edited by K Shanmukha-sundara Mudaliyar 1897

18 *Pancatantram* of Tandavaraya Mudaliyar, many editions.

19 *Vinoda rasa manjari* of Virasami chettiyar, 1917

20 Ramalingaswami, *Manumurai kanda vacakam*, many editions

21 Arumukha Navalar *Saiva Vidyanupalana* press

22 C R Namasivaya Mudaliyar, Tamil Readers 1-7, and New Tamil Readers, 1915 to 1923 We would strongly recommend his writing to the modern State Text Book makers

23 Those interested may glance through my Tamil book 'Tamil prose style of Today' published in 1945, and long out of print

THE TAMIL SCRIPT

With the evolution of the type-writing and printing techniques, and of the vast advanccs made in the newspaper printing trade, it has been found necessary to modify and reform the script in which the Tamil language is written at present This reform is found very essential both for speed and for conservation of space Newspapers are always racing for time, and conservation of space is necessary because space has become very costly On the two counts, reform of the Tamil script has been felt to be very urgent and imperative. We do not propose to go into the question of reform here, because it is a very vexing question which has taxed the brains all people - scholars, administrators, newspaper men and printers A satisfactory solution is yet to be found

But in order to give a fullness to the history of literature in this survey, we shall give here a short account of the evolution of the Tamil script The history of the script is still in the making, and the final word on the subject has not been said.

Writing varies from language to language, from region to region, and even from person to person It also varies with the material on which it is written, such as stone, copper plate or palm leaf, and now of course paper. The writer's own sense of art and his own dexterity of the fingers influenced the form of

the script. The tool of writing – the stylus, the pen or pencil, besides the fingers – had also a part in shaping the writing Writing speed and the idiosyncrasies of the scribe also affected the shape of the letters in the writing Certain languages and scripts are written from the right to the left. But the majority of languages and scripts are written only from the left to the right (clockwise).

THE SOURCES

For a knowledge of the early scripts, only a few sources are available to us. They are the following. Stone royal inscriptions of grants in the temple walls and the like. (Hero-stones may also be included in this category) Copper plate royal grants recorded on copper plates Both these are contemporary writing and always dated Potsherds. broken pots etc. discovered during archaeological excavations, these are all undated and their date has to be fixed, but such sources are very few. Palm leaf palm leaf manuscripts of ancient books are available at best probably for the last five hundred years. These are not writing contemporary with the writing of the book. they are merely copies of the copies of the original. Earlier and ancient manuscript palm leaves cannot be had, because the best palm leaves can exist only for a period of three hundred years, after that period they become brittle, crumble and are reduced to powder at the slightest touch or disturbance Hence no ancient palm leaves can be available now Palm leaves are of two kinds – the palmyrah and the talipot palm The second variety is more pliable, longer and broader, but with the passing of time, it becomes black and the writing thereon soon becomes indecipherable. The

ordinary palmyrah though stiffer does not get black, and so it was usually preferred Except a few manuscripts, almost all are in palm leaf When the old manuscripts became no longer fit for handling, scholars had new ones made. Hence we can have manuscripts written only during the last five hundred years and less. These naturally would give us only the script current at the time of their writing and are no guide to the original script

THE EARLY PERIOD

In the days of Asoka, a script called the *brāhmi* was employed for writing, throughout India Inscriptions in the Tamil country date back to the 3rd century B. C The same *brāhmi* letters, with some additional letters like la, la, ra, na (ழ, ள, ற, ன) peculiar to the Tamil language, are used in these inscriptions These are found mostly associated with jain rock-beds in natural caverns. A jaina text, assigned to the 1st century B C, calls this script *Damili*, that is, 'of the Tamil country'

This script underwent changes and evolved into the modern characters, through the centuries.

Two different scripts were employed in later times for writing the Tamil language They are popularly called the Tamil and the *vatteluttu* scripts These two begin to branch off from the parent *damili*, towards the end of 2nd century A. D. and were fully formed by the 5th century.

The Tamil script employed throughout the length and breadth of the Tamil country underwent a continuous evolution, and reached the present form towards the end of 17th century.

Vatteluttu, a form of circular script, was widely used in the Pāndimandalam region, the southern part of Tamilnad It was thought that this script originated and evolved only in Pandinādu, that is, the southern part of Tamilnad. But recent discoveries and researches have proved that this script was prevalent all over the Tamilnad, except the Chōla region. Inscriptions found on hero-stones, particularly in the northern districts, are mostly in this script, which indicate the popularity of this script among the masses However, this ceased to be an effective script for writing in the northern districts by the end of 8th century, but was continued vigorously in the Pandiya region The Pandiyas seem to have had a preference for this, for some of their royal charters on copper plates are found in this script. For reasons inexplicable, the Chōla country never had any fancy for this script, and it is not found anywhere in that region.

THE CHOLA PERIOD

When the Chōḷas rose to be an imperial power in the 10th century and brought the entire Tamil country under their banner, they favoured the Tamil script. The *vatteluttu* lingered on in the Pandiya region for another three centuries, before disappearing completely from the scene The west coast, which had a natural geographical isolation, continued with the *vatteluttu* till very late It took there another form as *kōleluttu* and ultimately went out of use For writing Sanskrit and Prakrit works, a script now being called the *grantha* was employed It is likely that the name *Drāvidi*, applied to a script in the Buddhist text *Lalitavistāra*, refers to this form of writing *Grantha*, which bears close resemblance to early Kannada and Telugu

scripts in the formative stages, was the main script employed throughout Tamilnad for Prakrit and Sanskrit writings It was the most popular and influential script for over 1600 years Till a decade ago, all the Sanskrit books published in Tamilnad were in this script, even today the aged scholars could read only this script

The *nāgari* script was also used sparsely in Tamilnad from the 8th century The Pallavas and the Āy chieftains of Vēnādu have made use of this script. The Chōlas also did use this script on some of their coins The Vijayanagar emperors employed it on some of their royal charters The *nāgari* of the Vijayanagar period was called the *nandi-nāgari*

There was a gradual improvement of the writing under the Chōlas The most handsome letters have been shaped in the days of Rajaraja I. The script began to undergo a change after him and, by the period of the Vijayanagar empire, it had settled into a permanent form, which has come down to the persent day and has also been universally adopted all over the Tamilnad, as can be seen in the manuscript books available from the different areas.

Some of the grammarians like Tolkāppiyar, Divākarar, Yāpparunkalam commentator and Mayilainātha have devoted some thought to the subject of script, it is beyond the scope of our purpose here, to discuss their thoughts

PRINTING

The Tamil script took on its present, more or less permanent, shape only when Tamil books began to be

printed, ie., by the beginning of the 18th century. The first printing closely followed the manuscript writing found on the cadjan leaf books It differed considerably from the writing of today It did not use separate symbols for long *ē* and the long *ō* (எ, ஒ, ெ-ே) It did not use the dot to denote a pure consonant as distinguished from the consonant plus the vowel *a*; eg., *k* and *ka* (க, க) were written alike It did not distinguish between the symbol for a long sound such as *ā*, *ō* and the letter *ra* (கா, கொ, கோ, ர) it did not begin to use the left downward elongation on the letter *ra* (ர) now found in print The symbol of *la* (ள) now written over the horizontal line of short *u* (உ) to denote that it is long *ū* (ஊ) in modern print, was then printed after *u* as a separate letter (உள) In all the above cases, — *ē*, *ō* (vowels and consonants), *ra* and *ū* and pure consonant sounds (without *a*), — only the reader familiar with manuscript reading could read the printed book correctly and fluently Thus the print of those days was a close imitation of the manuscript writing of the period Paper manuscripts of the period also may be seen to be exactly like the cadjan leaf writing

The symbol for *la* (ள) in the first printing was itself a little confused when compared with the modern symbol The letter now begins in a small circlet from the left, goes clockwise, has a downward stroke, goes up then and ends with another downward stroke. In the first printing, the second downward stroke was further drawn down, inwards, as we have in *ē* and *ra* (எ, ர) in modern writing and print. In time, this downward projection was abandoned

Again the symbol *ai* (ஐ) for consonants Most letters take on a separate symbol as a prefix (ை); the

na, *na* (the nasal which is the softener for the hard medial), *la* and *la* (ணை, ணை, லை, ளை) are exceptions today in print; in these cases a superimposed circlet is joined to the small curl which begins each letter This is a great nuisance in typing, as every one knows It may be interesting to know that there was a different earlier form of this symbol. In respect of the four letters mentioned here, a symbol exactly like *va* (வ) was prefixed and the open arm of the letter *va* was joined to the initial curl of the letter to make the vowel *ai* combination of that consonant This form was current even during the first quarter of this century, when it was dropped, giving place to the present symbol Hence no tear need be shed if this separate symbol in regard to the four consonants only is dropped and a uniform separate prefixed *ai* symbol (ை) is adopted for all the consonants

The following symbols again are illogical and require to be changed, ா the long of இ, many consonants with *u* and *ū* – such as *ku* and *kū* (கு, கூ); many consonants with ஆ, ஓ, ஓ – such as ணா, ரு, ளு, ணொ, ணோ etc, and some similar others

A second stage of the printing was the superimposition of a dot on *e* and *o* short, to show that the sound is short, on the consonant-vowel *a* combinations to indicate that they are only consonants The third stage of course is the present print where the symbol for letters *ē* and *ra* are just projected downward a little to the left, the symbols in consonants for *ē* and *ō* are given an additional loop at the top and bottom respectively (ே) and the symbol *la* is imposed over the horizontal line in the symbol for *u* to make it *ū*.

The shape of the letters has not been uniform even in all modern printing types The vagaries of of the type-caster in the type foundries have given rise to considerable change and mutilation even in the accepted shape of the letters , as an instance may be mentioned the old 10 point small pica antique types. The downward curve of the letters ழ and ஜ is not brought to the level of the top of the letter here but is simply ended below the base of the letter, in the letter இ, the arc enveloping the whole letter does not cut though the two loops at the bottom but merely makes a round.

We may not be certain that the last word on the subject has been said As pointed out in the opening lines of this section, a reform necessitated by space and speed is certain to come[3] and we may not be sure that our grand children's children will be studying the same script that we studied.

Notes

1. The *vatteluttu* is so called because it was always in the shape of curves (*vattam* – circle, curves) *Kanneluttu* mentioned in the *Silappadhikaram* may be considered to be this *vatteluttu*
2. The city of Pataliputra was then known as *Nagara* (the city) and the script that was largely in use there was the *nagari* This was naturally glorified later as *deva-nagari*
3. When we start having an expert committee for standardising a rational form for the letters, there is disagreement and confusion But if some imaginative and enterprising printer adopts the innovation and alterations without any, they will automatically become the standard forms in the course of quarter of a century

INSCRIPTIONS

THEIR NATURE

The most important source for determining the history of South India, more particularly of the Tamil nad, is the inscriptional evidence. The Pāndiyas, the Chōlas and the Pallavas had recorded their gifts to temples and to individuals mostly in their inscriptional records on the outer walls of the inner shrines of most of the old granite temples, and occasionally on copper plate grants also A few of these plates have been discovered and their records published But most of them had been destroyed, as the plates were melted for their copper value by ignorant people who could not know the historical and cultural value of the plate records A large part of the temple inscriptions are still available but quite a large part had also been destroyed, when well-intentioned people, who had of course devotion but no knowledge of the cultural and historical value of the inscriptions, started the work of temple renovation during the end of the last century and the first quarter of this century When rebuilding, the large stones containing inscriptional records were chiselled or dismantled and displaced in such a manner that the records could not be read again The Archaeological department at the Centre had however taken copies of many of such records before dismantling, some they have published, but many more yet remain unpublished.

The persons who originally invented epigraphy seem to have been very thoughtful people. There is nowhere any brick inscription when even stone inscriptions crack up and crumble into powder, through the action of the atmosphere, the fate of any brick inscription can easily be imagined Nor has any intrinsically costly material been used anywhere. marble has not been used, only granite stones have been put to the largest use Similarly copper; iron will rust in no time and so it was never used Silver and gold had instrinsic value as precious metals So although there was plenty of these metals in the past, they were never used for records of grants, because the plates would come to be used for their metal value and records of grants would cease to exist.

Tamil inscriptions are found not only in the Tamilnad but also in the adjoining Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam speaking areas bordering on Tamilnad (Andhra pradesh, Mysore and Kerala states), over which the Tamil ruling dynasties held away at various periods, they are also found in their overseas territories such as Ceylon and Malaysia.

A number of rock inscriptions are found around Madurai and they date from the 3rd century B C to the 2nd century A D They record the fashioning of a rock with a polished surface within a cave to serve as a sort of rockbed to the Jain monks by merchants of the period; a pillow *in situ* had also been provided in rock A groove had also been arranged for the soaking rain water to collect and flow out Pāndiyan Neduncelıyan is mentioned in one such inscription. Another mentions Kadumko, probably Pālai-pādiya–

perum Kadumkō of the sangham period[1]. Thus they are all important in the reconstruction of the history of the period. An inscription of the period[2] mentions some musical instruments; it is probably the earliest inscription on a musical subject

Another type of inscriptions is that which has come to be known now as the hero-stone Tolkāppiyar[3] says that a stone was placed in memory of a soldier who fell in battle, his name and achievements were inscribed on it and worship was offered to it by the grateful community for whose sake he gave up his life. This has come to be known as the hero-stone This is celebrated in *Aha nānūru*[4] and *Pura nānūru*[5] Sēramān perumāl[6] goes out of the way to mention it, in one of his poems in the Eleventh Book of the Saiva Canon.

The discovery of many hero-stones recently in several places[7] has opened up a new area of research in this field These stones mostly deal with warriors who fell fighting in battle or for some other similar cause. Many aspects of the concepts dealt with in the *Purapporul* part of Tamil grammar[8] find exemplified in these inscriptions. The hero-stones have probably given rise to the later worship of heroes as minor deities, in various parts of the country We see in the hero-stone inscriptions the common man also (not the patron or chief, nor the accomplished hero) being made the subject of praise and record

The Chōlas are responsible for switching over the emphasis in inscriptions from Sanskrit and Prakrit to Tamil. All their inscriptions are indeed monuments to the Tamil language, its poetry and its culture. We

find elegant phrases taken from the Śaiva canon and given to the Sivācāryas and women dancers[9] in the temple

THEIR FORM AND CONTENT

The inscriptions usually have a first part which sings of the glory of the ruling monarch, this part is always in verse, the second part deals with the specific grants recorded in that particular inscription. Vijayālaya, the founder of the Chōla dynasty at Tanjāvūr in the ninth century, had some hero-stone inscriptions, no inscriptional grants The grand form of the inscriptions started with Rājarāja I.[10] All Chōla inscriptions opened with the phrase *svasti-śrī* (let there be peace and happiness)

The Tamil preface, the first part of the inscription, is called *meik-kīrtti*, later grammatical books lay down rules for writing the *meik-kīrtti* It is often in the *āsiriyam* metre and also in the *kalippā* metre. It started with a few lines, but as the empire expanded, and as the conquests of the kings grew and their empires expanded, the *meik-kīrtti* also swelled in size and we have *meik-kīrtti* running to 100 lines and more. This ends in the following form 'in the regnal year of King reigning from his throne with his queen (The introduction of the queen into the inscriptions starts with Vīrarājēndra [11]) Then follows particulars of the grant, and lastly, the officer of state under whose orders the grant was recorded, the names of the witnesses to the record, the name of the person who actually transferred it to stone and finally something on the following lines: Don't forget virtue May Mahēśvara help us.'

The first part is often of good verse, composed in an assonant style, with rhyme and alliteration Generally it gives an account of some kings, their battles, the places of battle, the capital cities, the princes who were defeated, the extent of annexation made, the resulting good to the country, and similar facts. This has been the source for the reconstruction of the political history of the Chōla dynasty.

The second part gives details of grants - the temple to which the grant is made, the political divisions of the country corresponding to the modern province, district, taluk etc , names of deities, extent of land, boundaries, purposes for which given, amount of annual income expected in kind and converted into gold, service for which intended, number of persons, wage rates, schedule of articles used and their quantities, food and other such details, including the penalty for non-performance of service.

THEIR VALUE

It is evident that the temples served as a sort of public record office which preserved documents affecting the community for a considerable length of time Temple walls are open to public view and can be known by all A document recorded there does not perish, as palm leaves are likely to perish, in a few centuries No one can do away with it or alter it.

We get here a glimpse of the weights and measures in use then, and their names, land measurements, rates of wages for the different services , names of vessels, jewels, lands, places, dresses, and a host of others , in fact we get here a new vocabulary as it were, unheard

of in modern days and even in other recorded literature. We hear for the first time in Indian history the practice of village autonomy, an administration of the village by the village elders, we get an insight into the political divisions of the kingdom and their administration, the order of inheritance of the crown, the king's cabinet, the manner of taxation and public revenue, the administration of justice, franchaise, election, village assemblies, maintenance of irrigation sources, land survey, classification of lands, social customs, trade, embassies, coinage, education, medicine, handicrafts, methods of worship, temple orchestra, food and nutrition, sanitation and hygiene, and similar activities of public life. This opens up before us a new world of words and their usage, which is very valuable in linguistic research.

The Chōḷa history for a period of five centuries from the ninth to the thirteenth has been completely reconstructed from these records and this fully agrees with the available literary evidences of such history. The Pāndiya and the Pallava history has been reconstructed in part Pāṇḍiya inscriptional records are available from the eighth century, we know about the Kaḷabhra interregnum only from the Vēḷvikkudi grant of the period [12] When the Muslims invaded Madurai, the Pāndiyas fled the city and settled themselves at Tenkāśi, further south. Inscriptions of the Tenkāśi Pāndiyas are avilable till the sixteenth century [13] Similarly Pallava inscriptions are also available from the seventh, their earliest incriptions were in prakrit upto the fourth century; then inscriptions in Sanskrit upto the sixth century, lastly we have their *grantha*-Tamil grants from the seventh century. The Pallavās

had been patrons of Sanskrit learning and their inscriptions had a considerable amount of Sanskrit in them.

LITERATURE

The inscriptions throw light on the life and work of about a hundred poets and men of letters They have made indeed a significant contribution to literature also. The hymns sung by Sambandha, collected into the first threebooks of the Saiva canon are 383 *padikams* A *padikam* not collected into the canon, on Tiru-Vidaivāy,[14] a shrine in Tanjavur district, has been made available from the inscriptions. A complete poem, *Tiri - Sirāmalaiantādi*,[15] of 104 verses, by Nārāyanan son of Maniyan in praise of Lord Śiva of that place, is found inscribed on the temple walls. These are rare finds of long and complete poems Other valuable finds include the verses on Kōpperum-Singa, Kārigai-kulattūr, the *Paṭṭinap-pālai* mandapam and the Tenkāśi Pāndiyas.

An inscription of Kōpperum-Singa (13th c)[16] says that he hoisted his banner on the hill of Nanna celebrated in the poem *Kadām*, the reference is to the the *Malaipadukadām*, the last poem of the *Pattup-pāṭṭu*. The sangham poet Kapilar is mentioned in an inscription of Rājarāja I,[17] 'he arranged for the wedding of the daughters of Pāri who had been sheltered by him and then gave up his life.' A Pāndiya inscription refers to the sixteen pillared hall,[18] where the poem *Pattinappālai* was released We learn that the Bhāratam was translated into Tamil under Kulōttunga III.[19]

Many incidents which are generally considered to be mere legend are found recorded in inscriptions. Meypporul nāyanār not only gave up his life for the cause of Śiva's emblem, but also took special pains to ensure that the foe who killed him did not come to harm, this fact is recorded on the pedestal of his image as 'the lord of Milādu who said, Datta, this is our friend', the point of interest here is that this inscription is earlier[20] then Sēkkilār, who has sung about this incident in his *Periya Purānam* We learn that one street in Tiru Arur was called 'the street which gave out the fragrance of the feet of the Lord', in memory of the visit of the Lord of Tiru Arur at dead of night to the house of Paravai as the messenger of love from Sundara.

An inscription of the Vijayanagara rulers (A D. 1443) records that Śiva enshrined in Tiru Nelvāyil-Aratturai was known as 'He who gave a pearl palanquin', celebrating an incident narrated in the story of Tiru Jñāna Sambandha in the same *puraṇam* There are scores of similar instances

Cidambaram and Tiru Adhikai temple inscriptions contain 61 *venbas* giving an account of the contribution made by Naralōkavīran Kālingarāyan to the two temples [21] Tiruvannāmalai temple inscriptions give us 22 verses singing the glory of Magadaip-perumāl.[22] Similar instances are many.

The references to literary figures and poems and phrases and expressions, taken from literature such as the Saiva Canon, have immense historical value in helping us to determine the period of the writers and

their writing. Inscriptions are besides a form of real prose, contemporary Tamil, as it was spoken and written down in public records. We have thousands of such temple records, they have not yet been fully explored from the literary and the linguistic points of view. A devoted study of the records will amply reward patient scholars and will help them to take further strides in the march of linguistic and literary development

Notes and References

1 *Vide Kalvettiyal*, R Nagasami and others Nedunceliyan page 49, Kadumko - page 67

2 *Ibid* page 75

3 *Tolkappiyam, Poruladhikaram* 63, lines 19-20

4. *Aha nanuru* 131, also *Malaipadukadam* lines 388-9, *Kural* 771

5. *Pura nanuru* verses 221, 223, 260-1 and many others.

6. *Tiru Arur mummanikkovai*, verse 16 lines 1-2

7 *Vide Sengam nadu karkal* R Nagasami, 1972

8 *Purapporul venba malai* 175, 247–253

9. Cf Tarunendu sekhara bhattan, Edutta padam, Malalai cilambu, Maruda manikkam etc

10. *Cholar caritram* Sadasiva Pandarattar, part I 1958, page 100

11. *Ibid* page 282, Cf Virarajendra's *meykkirtti* beginning '*virame tunaiyakavum*'

12 *Peruntohai*, M Raghava Aiyangar 1936, verse 889

13 *Ibid* verses 942-52, and others

14 *Tiruvidaivayp-padikam*, Sambandhar *Devaram*, Samajam edition 1937, page 639.

15 *Tiri-Siramalai antadi* edited by M Raghava Aiyangar 1953.

16 Inscription of the period of Kopperum-singan in the Tiru Annamalai temple, S I I , vol VIII, pages 39–41.

17 Inscription of the period of Rajaraja I from Tirukkovalur, page 266 of *Cholar caritram* I quoted

18 Inscription from Tiru Vellarai temple, verse beginning '*veriyar talavattodai*' Sundaia Pandiyan 1219 A D.

19 MER 482 of 1905

20 '*Datta namare kan enra miladudaiyar*' – an inscription of the period of Rajaraja I S I I , vol II, No 40

21 *Peruntohai* verses 1065–94 , 1095–1119

22 *Ibid* 1158–1179

In addition the following books may be studied with profit: *Sasana Tamil kavi caritam,* M Raghava Aiyangar 1937; *Sasana seyyul manjari,* Mayilai - Sini Venkatasami 1959 , and *Kalvettiyal,* R Nagasami and others 1972

THE MODERN PERIOD

Under this heading we shall speak a few words about the achievements and the trends of the twentieth century. We are much too much involved in the period to make an objective estimate of its trends The forces which make for literary output during this period are many The vast development of printing and journalism, the unprecedented and extensive development of literacy, the after-effects of two global wars and the psycho-social pressure resulting therefrom, the impact of the two great powers, the United States of America and Russia on all aspects of Indian life and thought, and most important, the struggle for independence, the Gandhian era and its final culmination in the achievement of Indian independence – all these factors have shaped writing in Tamilnad, as in the rest of India The advances in printing have made vast strides in prose possible, and journalism has given birth to a large crop of writers of varying worth Journalism necessarily means the filling up of so many pages daily, weekly and monthly, and pen-pushing has become an unavoidable necessity English education has made the West the model for this purpose. This model is easy and ready-made, to evolve a model out of one's own cultural heritage is very difficult, and impossible for most.

BHARATI

The one poet who forged a link between the past and the present and between the present and the future, who excelled in prose as well as in poetry, and who exploited journalism to a higher literary purpose with considerable success, was Subrahmanya Bhārati. The rise of this genius synchronised with the freedom fight, and in him we have perhaps the greatest national poet for *all* time The passing of years will only heighten the value of his poetry, even after nationalism dies, a major portion of his poetry will live as a cherished literary legacy of the Tamils He was a prolific writer, poetry, prose, short story, political criticism, social reform, devotional writing, and philosophical exposition flowed from his pen freely. In the struggle against poverty and against the oppression of the foreign yoke, he could not last long, he died young, at the close of the first world war, long before freedom was won Much of his writing was prophetic[1] and far ahead of his times Writers like him are not produced every other day. He had many imitators in his own day, but they were just versifiers and no more, a versifier can certainly produce a few good verses in a life time, that does not make him a poet Desikavinayakam Pillai had occasional flashes of good poetry but he was a far cry from Bhārati His importance lies in the fact that keeping his poetry firmly rooted in Tamil culture, he allowed the wind from the West to blow over its blooms.

THE PAST

English education has produced *Manōnmaniyam*,[2] a drama on the western model It is good and is original as far as it goes, because there was no literary form of the drama before it

Sūryanārāyana Śāstri, a great Tamil enthusiast, lived in the last quarter of the 19th century, he died very young. Being English educated, he felt the need for original writing in Tamil on the western model and so made many attempts to produce literature in several fields He wrote dramas in verse, essays and also poetry, besides literary criticism. He was responsible for two trends in Tamil writing One was an imitation of English writing. he wrote many 'sonnets' in Tamil composed in fourteen lines on various natural objects, which were just poor verse He forgot that each language had its own emotional, rhythmic and poetic form and a blind and mechanical imitation of the verse form in another language was not conducive to the production of poetry in one's own language. Again, he lived in an age when the struggle for freedom was afoot. This had its reaction in the literary sphere also. Out of a misguided enthusiasm for Tamil, he was responsible for fanning the anti-Sanskrit movement, he had changed his name from Sūryanārāyana Śāstri to Pariti-māl-Kalaijñar which is a Tamil rendering of the Sanskrit words. He was a brahmin himself and he was English educated, naturally his enthusiasm for pure Tamil evoked great admiration. But the result was more harm than good.

Poetry and music to be great must be inspired. Inspiration never comes through agitation The Tamil *isai* movement from the point of view of common sense is most correct It has produced quite a large volume of musical composition But rarely do we find in all these compositions a single piece of the emotional standard of Muttu Tāndavar or Gopālakrisna Bhārati.

Journalistic writing had brought to the fore many talented writers like Kalyanasundara Mudaliyar and Kalki (R Krishnamurti) Their writing released the Tamil muse from her shackles and gave her a fresh freedom of movement, power and joy. This occurred during the years around 1930 when the written word was employed with power to carry to the masses the message of the freedom fight The short story was made popular in the whole of India by Tagore, and originated by Bhārati and V V S Aiyar in Tamilnad, it caught on, and today a writer here means a short story writer Persons eminent in their own right such as Rajaji and Dr Swaminatha Aiyar could not resist exploiting this medium

The great older writers never stopped to consider whether the word they used was of Sanskrit origin or of Tamil origin It was always a struggle for expression and an earnest desire to put across one's own innermost thoughts. They handled words as they occurred and never cared to stop and choose.

T K C was the greatest exponent of literary taste and poetic appreciation He had a keen ear for poetry and those who had the good fortune to come under his influence, had the greatest time of their lives. Like the famous Dr. Johnson of English

literature, and Minaksisundaram Pillai, Swaminatha Aiyar's *guru* of the 19th century, he was a giant among stalwarts and he always radiated love and culture, and an emotional and creative appreciation of all art and all life, literature and poetry were only part of his greater personality Many under his influence have flowered into good and artistic writers

The tradition of accurate textual scholarship was started by Swaminatha Aiyar, the torch was held aloft by Vaiyapuri Pillai after him, but such scholarship has since become scarce

The prose-poem (or free verse), an imitation of similar writing in English, was the fashion a decade ago It was merely a cloak to cover dearth of ideas, absence of form, ignorance of language and an unwillingness to discipline oneself

The new writers often speak of appealing to the common man as if it were the touchstone by which all creative writing shall be judged The arbiter of Literature and Art is, not the common man, but the cultured man All poets sing only for the cultivated mind, a mind of culture, not necessarily the educated or the learned An unlettered man may be a man of culture, while one highly educated may be blissfully innocent of any culture We can only say that among the really cultured, caste or class is no bar to a complete understanding and appreciation of art and letters People who had known T K C in their lives would have noticed that his exposition of poetry equally appealed to the highly learned and to the untutored, but not to the pedant, the bigot, and the highly sophisticated academician.

THE PRESENT

Modern writing in general claims to be realistic-a feature copied from foreign writing Indian art and writing have always had an element of idealism in them. If realism is the utter absence of idealism, it would degenerate into vulgarity What may appear to be realistic to the foreign eye may not appear so to the Indian eye but may appear coarse and vulgar. Vulgarity cannot become art. It had always been looked down upon by eminent writers through the centuries Every nation and every language has its own way of expressing things, the Tamil language has a form of expressing every life experience in its own way, which we call a refined way A certain degree of coarseness had marked some earlier Tamil poetry no doubt because of the poet's cheap desire to pander to the tastes of the petty uncultured chiefs of the 18-19th centuries But this was against the general vein of poetic composition in the Tamil language

Popular art or art for the masses need not necessarily mean vulgarity It may mean simplicity, perhaps over-simplification, but certainly not coarseness '*Kāyamē idu poyyadā-kārradaitta paiyada*' (this body is unreal, it is only an inflated bag) - a song of the popular street beggar, is certainly over-simple, but it is not vulgar or coarse

The modern days witness a regimentation of all thought and writing. The film, the radio, the journals and the cheap foreign books have all become the disseminators of bad taste and coarseness. Some one remarked that India is the paradise of hippidom ; the

truth of this statement will be borne out by a superficial glance at the best-selling weekly and monthly journals in Tamilnad Such an atmosphere is against the spirit of all that the Tamilian has held dear and valuable through the ages, against all that Tiruvalluvar and Ilangō in the distant past and Bhārati in the recent present stood for

Vulgarity attracts the 'common man' and it is his vote which seals the fate of the political party Hence to pander to low taste, coarseness and vulgarity would appear to be the aim now of any human activity on the popular front One who does not tow the party line in such matters is pushed out, and once pushed out, there is no coming back And besides, every one has to live So by any means he manages to keep himself in the front line of affairs Those who call themselves academicians and writers have blindly imbibed this trend and have given us large quantities of such writing We need not call it literature This is not to say that no great literature has been produced in the present age It is undeniable that no one of the modern writers comes anywhere near Subrahmanya Bharati Perhaps some may have produced good literature in fields other than poetry But it is well nigh impossible to pick out literature from the maze of the material which is being reeled off in an ever increasing torrent from the press

The years coming immediately after the second world war witnessed a complete change in all spheres of human activity in our country In the sphere of literary production, the change was towards a blind

imitation of all that was American or Russian. Old moorings had violently snapped Art is a reflection of the personality of man, blooming from his inner most being, it is rarely achieved through imitation, however great the original and however laudable the attempt But Art and Literature cannot thrive upon a total repudiation of the past All growth in art or literature should have its roots in the past; its branches may reach out any where, to the four corners of the globe, but all the nourishment therefor has to be taken mostly from the roots

A new life and a new vigour is discernible among a section of the younger generation of the Tamil writers and academic scholars, they seek to appraise the past with a view to find a key to the eternal values held sacred by the Tamilian. This augurs well for the future of the Tamil language and its literature.

An objective appraisal of contemporary writing can be best made by posterity, but it is good and desirable that periodically we critically review the past and the present of our literature and set the poets and the poems in a new order.

Notes and References

1 *Vide* his tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and Maha mahopadhyaya Swaminatha Aiyar, while they were alive, and long before their greatness had any wide acclaim

2 *Manonmaniyam* edited by Vaiyapuri Pillai 1930

3 The editions issued by the Oriental Manuscripts Library in Madras *(vide* their *Sundara pandiyam)* and by the Sarasvati Mahal Library of Tanjavur (*vide* their volume containing three *Pillai–Tamil* poems and their *Bharatam–Mavindam*) bear witness to this.

APPENDICES

NOTES

1 *MUTTOLLAYIRAM*

There have been quite a number of major poems, which are frequently quoted by the classical commentators with great reverence but are lost to us They are *Sirrattakam* on love themes, *Perum porul vilakkam* on *puram* themes, *Muttollayiram* (on both *aham* and *puram* themes), *Asiriya malai* (in the *asiriyappa* metre on ethical themes), and *Tagadur yattirai* (probably a connected narrative in *venba* and *asiriyappa*, dealing with the raid of the three Tamil monarchs on the city of Adhikan and his destruction) Except the last, the others are all isolated verses, the first three are in the *venba* metre The writers refer to these books along with the 18 *Kilk-kanakku* We get quite a large volume of the verses from these books cited in the various commentaries

These books may be placed in the 7th and the 8th centuries A D A few words may be said here about *Muttollayiram* It might probably have been a poem of 900 verses (*tollayiram* – 900) sung on the three ruling princes of Tamilnad It is a unique classic, in the tradition of the sangham age, but more elastic and more lyrical About 110 verses from the poem are now available and they make us feel that the Tamil language is all the poorer for the loss of the whole poem Each of the verses available is supremely dramatic, enacting a scene on the theme chosen, be it love or war, with two or more characters The language, though simple, is neither archaic nor very modern and is fully charged with emotion

The composition will for ever be an enigma to the historian During the period when the author wrote the poem, there was only the Pandiya ruler ruling from Madurai There was no Chola ruler of any importance and nothing is known about the Sera ruler of the period The question how the author chose to sing on the three rulers remains unanswered

2 *PANCA MARAPU*

In a world of newly emerging hypercriticism which seeks to denigrate most things ancient in Tamil literature with disbelief and the charge of exaggeration and legendry, it is heartening to find that a grammatical manual on music and dance quoted by Adiyarkku nallar the commentator of Silappadhikaram has now been brought to light and published, after this volume went to the press *Panca marapu* (see page 47 of this book) is one of the five manuals quoted by Nallar as the authority for his commentary All of them appear to have passed into oblivion, however, this book *Panca marapu,* by some accidental stroke of good fotune, seems to have been preserved by V R Deivasikhamani goundar Its first part dealing with two of its five sections has been published with an ancient gloss 124 venbas find place in this part out of a total of 240 Though the sangham age and earlier periods are claimed as the date for this manual, it can be seen that it was composed by the end of the 9th century The publication should silence the sceptics and would assure that most of the literature, claimed to be lost by the various commentators, did in fact really exist.

3 *AHAM and PURAM* (*Vide* page 31)

A note on this subject should have gone into the text of this book as one of the early sections In its place the following note is here appended Poetry in the sangham age falls into the two broad classifications *aham* and *puram* *Aham* means inside and *puram* outside, these signify love poetry and other poetry Other poetry has been elaborately dealt with as war poetry and chiefly as everything else besides love This classification does not appear to exist in other literatures Tamilnad of two thousand years ago seems to have been ruled by the three royal houses Sera, Chola and Pandiya, besides a a few petty chiefs Population was sparse, people had the wherewithal to live a life of ease and comfort Music and dance there was in plenty, and food and drink The ruling houses and the chiefs often fought with one another Poets and bards were mediators and counsellors Men lived a happy life, engaging themselves in love at home and outside, taking part in the wars

of their chiefs In this atmosphere was born the tradition of the *aham* poetry and the *puram* peotry A high sense of patriotism and honour in war and of chivalry in domestic life pervaded the culture of the people These two aspects were gradually evolved into an artistic literary convention

As has been pointed out elsewhere, the major part of the sangham poetry deals with the *aham* or love themes and this was again related to the five physiographical regions The life of the lovers is traced through various experiences which are related to the regions and are called *tinai*, behaviour and experience They meet in the verdant and luxious forest where their first passion blooms into love this is *kurinji* The clandestine love is naturally followed by the pangs of separation *palai* (desert) Then ensues a period of patient waiting in the home, *mullai* An agonised waiting follows, which is called *neidal* Lastly quiet domestic felicity resulting through mature love, of course with its attendant infidelity (which was probably a part of the life of the period), and sulking, called *marutam* Not only the land, but the season and the time of the day have been set apart for each *tinai* Other distinctive features, comprising of the patron deity, the class of people, animals, the flora and the fauna, the food, music and the avocation of the people, constitute another section of the convention The sentiments related to the union, the separation, the patient waiting, the agonized waiting, and the quiet life and its sulking form the third section of this convention

The entire love poetry is in the nature of little dramatic episodes or monologues Convention lays down the actors, the poet never says anything, only the characters speak Here all characters are in the abstract, no one could be specified by his or her proper name, whereupon it would cease to be love poetry and become *puram* poetry

The other section *puram* dealt mostly with tribal wars There is also here definite poetic convention laying down seven divisions in the war poetry, all of them named after flowers *Veṭçi* is the capturing of the enemy's herds of cows, *karantai*

is their rescue, *vanji* is the advance on the enemy, and *kanci* is the defence against that advance, *nocci* is the defence of a fort and *ulinai* is its siege, *tumbai* is the battle, and lastly *vahai* is the victory Such wars bring home to the leaders the transcient nature of all life and *kanci* the next stage defines this, *padan* the last division is the praise of the victor and eventually of all patrons *Tolkappiyam* includes *kanci* and *nocci* in *vanji* and *ulinai* and gives only a total of seven divisions All poetry which is not on a love theme is brought into these *puram* divisions Poetry which is of the general nature of a praise of the patron is brought under *padan*.

THE SCHEME OF TRANSLITERATION

Tamil words are usually rendered here into English as they are pronounced by normal educated people, and not as they are spelt in the Tamil alphabet The transliteration has been made in accordance with the Sanskrit spelling in respect of Tamil words of well known Sanskrit origin

Some terms familiar to Tamilians like Chola have been written only in this spelling without changing Ch into C as strict transliteration would require, the term Tamil (and Tamilnad) and its cognates have been spelt only as Tamil instead of Tamil (and Tamil nādu), so also swami, these are a concession to familiar spelling in the land

The *r* ending as an honorific suffix in many personal names such as Sambandhar and Sundarar has been omitted but retained in a few others like Appar and Kambar The spelling Sera has been preferred to Cera (or Chera) The two words, names of places Vanji and Kanci (வஞசி, காஞசி), though they may appear to sound alike, are written differently as given here, Kanci takes on a harder sound at the end because probably of its association with the hard sound in another form Kacci

Excepting the variations pointed out here, the generally accepted pattern of diacritical marking has been adopted Diacritical marks have been adopted only in the text, they have not been adopted in the footnotes or in the index etc for obvious handicaps in the printing press

The scheme of transliteration is explained below.

Vowels			Consonants				
அ	–	a	க்	–	k	ல்	– l
ஆ	–	ā	ங்	–	n	வ்	– v
இ	–	i	ச	–	c	ழ	– l
ஈ	–	ī	ஞ	–	ñ	ள	– ḷ
உ	–	u	ட்	–	t	ற	– r
ஊ	–	ū	ண	–	n	ன	– n
எ	–	e	த்	–	t	ஜ	– j
ஏ	–	ē	ந	–	n	ஸ	– s
ஐ	–	ai	ப	–	p	ஷ	– s
ஒ	–	o	ம	–	m	ஶ	– ś
ஓ	–	ō	ய	–	y	க்ஷ	– ks
ஔ	–	ou	ர	–	r	ஹ	– h

n before k and g takes the corresponding guttural nasal sound – ங and so no sparate symbol has been adopted here for ங, ங cannot occur at the beginning a word As there is now no difference in the pronunciation of ந and ன by the Tamilians, separate symbols are not used, only ந can occur at the beginning of a word and never ன

g, d, b – denote the soft guttural, dental and labial respectively; ḍ – the soft cerebral, these four soft sounds have no symbols in Tamil

h after a consonant, takes the corresponding aspirated consonant sound as in kh, gh, ch, ṭh, ḍh, th, dh, ph and bh (occurring only in Sanskrit words)

Notes

1 No attempt is made here to indicate the pronunciation of the Tamil letters, it is presumed the reader knows it Only an attempt to explain the appropriate English symbol is made here

2 The manuscript of this book, originally prepared for the press without diacritical marks, was later revised, incorporating diacritical marks In doing so, there could have occurred some inconsistencies in spelling for which I crave the indulgence of the reader.

GLOSSARY

Abhinaya — Indication of sentiment by gesture in a dance

acharya — spiritual preceptor

adhikaram — section

advaita — non-duality or monism, a school of philosophy

advaitin — follower of the advaita school of philosophy

agama — Sanskrit Saiva scripture

aham — love theme

ahapporul — poetics dealing with the love theme

aharadi — dictionary, alphabetical arrangement

ahaval — asiriyam, a type of metre

aintinai — the five types of love themes or behaviour according to the five regions of land

alankara — rhetoric

alvar — a Vaishnava saint

ammai — mother

ammanai — ballad song

ani — rhetoric

antadi — a poem of several verses where the end word of the first occurs as the first word of the next

aram — virtue, righteousness, general ethics

artha — wealth

asiriyam — a type of ancient metre, corresponding to the blank verse in English

atma — soul.

avatara — incarnation.

ayar — cowherd

ayiram — one thousand

Bhagavan — God

bhagavata — a devotee of Vishnu.

bhakta — devotee

bhakti — devotion to a personal God

bhashya — commentary on a religious treatise.

Cadjan — palm leaf manuscript.

chakravartti — emperor.

chandam — rhythmic musical flow of verse with a regular beat

charya — religious service.
citrak-kavi — variety of difficult verse.
Darsan — holy vision.
desika — preceptor.
dharma — righteousness, duty.
dvaita — dualism.
gita — song
gopi — an *ayar* girl, playmate of child Krishna.
grantha — a script in use in Tamilnad for writing the Sanskrit language, a couplet having 16 voiced letters to each line
guru — spiritual preceptor
Harijan — one of low caste
Inbam — love.
isai — music
itihasa — ancient grand epic.
iyal — literary matter, chapter in a book.
Jain — a religious sect following the Jina.
jnana — superior knowledge, enlightenment.
Kalaviyal — section of poetics on clandestine love.
kalippa — one of the four kinds of metre.
kalitturai — a variant of that metre
kalivenba — the *venba* metre, going on to many couplets without limit of lines
kallar — robber, name of a clan.
kama — love theme
kanda — section of book.
karma — the theory that action inevitably causes an experience of its effect.
kathai — story
kavi — a poem, a poet.
kavya — an epic, a poem.
kirttanai — musical piece
kovai — a string of verses; a poem of 400 verses giving topics from the love theme in a continuous narrative.
krida — sport.
kriya — ceremonial worship, ritual
kural — a couplet, variant of *venba*
kurava — a hill tribe, gipsy.

kurinji	—	the hill and hilly tracts, love themes relating to them.
kuttu	—	dance
Lokayata	—	materialist.
Malai	—	garland (of songs)
mani	—	gem, jewel
manipravala	—	a type of Tamil prose which employs a large admixture of Sanskrit words and phrases
mantra	—	mystic syllable, sacred formula.
marapu	—	literary convention
marutam	—	the pastoral land, love themes relating thereto
meykkirtti	—	the introductory part of a king's inscription setting forth his praises
moli	—	utterance, word
moksha, mukti	—	salvation, liberation
mudal	—	first
mullai	—	the forest area, love themes relating thereto
mutt (math)	—	monastery
mut-Tamil	—	three divisions of Tamil - *iyal, isai* and *natakam*
Nalayiram	—	four thousand, the Vaisnava canon
nambi	—	a nobleman among men
nanuru	—	four hundred
narpatu	—	forty
natakam	—	dance and drama
nayaka nayaki bhava	—	emotional poetic approach of the lover and the lady-love
nayanar	—	a Saiva saint (plural *nayanmar*)
neidal	—	the coastal area, love themes relating thereto
nighantu	—	a lexicographical work in verse
nondi	—	lame person.
nul	—	book.
nurpa	—	a type of metre, the *asiriyam*, corresponding to blank verse, an aphorism.
nuru	—	hundred.
Oduvar	—	*devaram* singer.

Pa	—	verse
padal	—	song
padam	—	musical mode, generally on a love theme
padikam	—	a decad, a devotional poem of ten verses
palai	—	the desert, love themes relating thereto
pallandu	—	a poem of benediction, many years.
pan	—	musical tune
pana	—	a minstrel, considered of low caste
paripadal	—	a type of metre for early musical verse
pattiyal	—	manual of poetics
pattu	—	song
periya	—	large, senior.
perum-kappiyam	—	major epic
porul	—	subject matter of poetry, wealth.
prabandha	—	a poetic composition
puja	—	ceremonial worship
pulavar	—	poet
puram	—	themes relating to peace and war, other than love
purana	—	an ancient story, large epic type of poetic work celebrating the glory of some deity or a great being.
Rishi	—	sage, seer
Saiva	—	a follower of Siva
sakti	—	the power of God personified as the mother goddess in modern parlance, His consort in legends
sangham	—	legendary academy or body of Tamil men of letters in Madurai, before the Christian era
sasana	—	inscription
sastra	—	scripture, science
sen-Tamil	—	literary Tamil
seyyul	—	verse
siddha	—	a realised soul
smriti	—	a law book with scriptural authority
sthala	—	holy place
sutra	—	aphorism
Talattu	—	lullaby
talisai	—	a kind of verse.

tapas	—	penance
tinai	—	situation and behaviour relating to the five regions and others, both *aham* and *puram*
tirattu	—	collection or selection of verses.
tiru	—	a prefix meaning sacred, holy
tirumoli	—	holy word
tohai	—	collection
Upanishad	—	the last section of the veda having philosophical import
urai	—	commentary
Vadakalai	—	northern sect of Vaishnavism
vaidika	—	relating to the veda, orthodox Hindu
vahai	—	symbol of victory, the laurel
Vaishnava	—	a follower of Vishnu
vallal	—	one who gives, a patron
vanji	—	a creeper, a metre in prosody
vedanta	—	the end of the Veda, a school of philosophy
venba	—	a verse of four lines, with four feet to the line, one of the four ancient metres
vetci	—	*ixora*, a flower
vidu	—	liberation
virali	—	singer-cum-dancer (woman)
Vira Saiva	—	a later sect of Saivism where the wearing of the Siva linga on the body is important
viruttam	—	a later type of easy fluent metre, with four lines, of the same foot arrangement
vyakarana	—	grammatical treatise (Sanskrit)
vyakyana	—	commentary
Yal	—	a stringed musical instrument of the past
yalp-pana	—	a *pana* who sang to the accompaniment of his *yal*
yoga	—	union

CHRONOLOGY OF THE LITERATURE

A chronology of the authors and the works discussed in this book is given here It is hoped that this will aid an understanding of the subject in the right historical perspective It is however not claimed that this is the final word on the matter Yet, this is a definite step forward on all matters which had generally been passed over, or which had been dealt with in a cursory or non-committal manner, by writers and historians to this day

Period	Works
upto 300 B C	The First Sangham and the Second Sangham, Tolkappiyam, poets like Muranjiyur Mudinagarayar
300 B. C to 100 A D	Ettuttohai — except Kalittohai and Paripadal, Pattuppattu
100 to 200	Kalittohai and Paripadal, Tirukkural
200 – 300	Silappadhikaram
300 – 400	Nanmanik-katigai, Tiri-kadukam and Mudumolik-kanji
400 – 500	Iniya 40, Inna 40, Kalavali 40 Karaikkal ammai and Tirumular
500 – 600	Aintinai 50, Aintinai 70, Tinaimoli 50, Tinaimalai 150, Kainnilai, Kar 40 Sirupanchamulam, Eladi. Manimekhalai The first Three Alvars — Poihaiyar, Bhutattar and Peyalvar
600 – 700	Naladiyar and Palamoli, Acarakkovai Sambandar, Appar, Aiyadigal Kadavarkon Tiruppan alvar, Tirumalisai alvar and Tondaradippodi alvar. Pandikkovai.

700 – 800	Perıod of great lıterary actıvıty ın Tamıl grammar, partıcularly poetıcs, Pannıru patalam Iraıyanar kalavıyal and ıts commentary, orally composed
	A second Agastıya and Tolkappıyar, and scores of pattıyal treatıses and other grammatıcal works
	Perum kathaı. Muttollayıram and others
	Sundarar and Seraman Perumal
	Atıravadıgal and Ilam-perumanadıgal
	Kulasekharar, Peııyalvar, Andal, and Tıru-mangaı alvar
800 – 900	Dıvakaram, Purapporul venba malaı, Tamıl nerı vılakkam, Panca marapu
	Kalavıyal *uraı* wrıtten down
	Kambar, Cıntamanı, Valaıyapatı
	Bharata venba, Nandıkkalambakam
	Manıkkavacakar, Tırukkovaı
	Nammalvar, Madhura kavı
900 – 1000	Pıngalar, Pannırupattıyal
	Kundalakesı, Nılakesı, Culamanı
	Manakkudavar Kural uraı
	Tırumalıgaı devar, Gandaradıttar, Sendanar, Tıruvalı Amudanar 11th Book of the Saıva Canon such as Kapılar, Paıanar, Kalladar, Pattınattar
	Tırı-Sıramalaı antadı
	Jınendra malaı
1000 – 1100	Yapparunkalam and Karıkaı Vırasolıyam
	Yapparunkalam and Karıkaı Commentarıes
	Ilampuranar Tolkappıya uraı
	Kalladam Tıruvalluvamalaı
	Sılappadhıkara arumpada uraı.
	Karuvur Devar, Nambıyandar Nambı
	Kana nul
1100 – 1200	Gunavırapandıtar, Dandı
	Perumdevanar Vırasolıya uraı
	Kalıngattupparanı, Sekkılar, Ottakkuttar
	Adıyarkku nallar Attısudı etc. of Avvaı.
	Tıru Undıyar, Tıruk-Kalıttrup-padiyar,

	Jnanamırtam
	Ramanuja nurrantadı, Satakopar-antadı, Sarasvatı antadı Tıruvaymolı-arayırappadı
	Arunkalacceppu
	Tıllaı Ula, Puhalur antadı, Ambıkapatı kovaı.
1200 - 1300	Nannul, Nambı ahapporul
	Tolkappıyam commentators — Perasırıyar, Senavaraıyar
	Puhalendı Nalavenba.
	Kalıngar Kural uraı, Parımelalagar, Perasiriyar Kovaı uraı Many commentarıes on Ettut-tohaı and 18 Kılk-kanakku
	Nambı Tıruvılayadal
	Aranericcaram, Yasodara kavyam
	Kulottunga Cholan Kovaı, Sankara Cholan Ula, Hıranya vataıp-paranı, Tanjaı Vanan kovaı
	Meıkandar, Arulnandı, Manavasakam Kadandar
	Bhattar — Tamıl Bhagavad gıta
	Nanjıyar, Idu, Perıyavaccan pıllaı, Guru para m paraı sıx thousand
	Sıddhar-arudam, Ullamudaıyan
1300 - 1400	Navanıtappattıyal, Urıccol nıghantu Kalavıyal karıkaı
	Mayılaınathar Nannul uraı.
	Vıllı Bharatam, Irattaıyar
	Umapatı sıvam
	Agastıyar devaram selectıon
	Kaccıyappa Sıvacarıyar Kanda puranam
	Naccınarkkınıyar — commentarıes on Tolkappıyam, Pattupattu, Kalıttohaı and Cıntamanı
	Tırunurrantadı, Meru mantara puranam, Jıva Sambhodanaı
	Sıva vakkıyar, later Avvaı, Pattınattar
	Sırrambala Nadıgal and hıs lıne of dıscıples,
	Tattuvaprakasa Kalottara
	Vedanta desıkar, Pıllaı Lokacharya and hıs group Gıtaı venba
	Begınnıng of Saıva sastra commentarıes.

1400 - 1500
Gayadhara nighantu
Arunagiri nathar, Kalamegham
Kadambari, Purattirattu
Many miscellaneous commentators — Pariti, Kalladar, Deivac-cilai etc
Tiru Vadavurar puranam, Upadesa Kandams.
Miscellaneous theological writers in Saivism
Tattuvarayar
Manavala mamuni
Sri puranam
Varuna kuladittan madal, Kapilar ahaval
Tiruccendur Pillai Tamil
Minor siddhas like Pambatti siddha, Teraiyar
Kanakkadhikaram

1500 - 1600
Tirrkkurugai perumal Kavirayar, his Maran Alankaram and other grammatical manuals
Revana siddha and his Aharadi nighantu,
Cudamani nighantu Cidambarap-pattiyal
Harischandra puranam, Pururava-caritam
The three Pandiyas — Varagunarama, Varatunga rama and Atívirarama
Kamalai Jnanaprakasa, Niramba Alagiyar,
Saiva Ellappa Navalar, Anadhari, Tirumalai natha etc — puranams
Bhagavata by Sevvaic-cuduvar and Arulala dasar, Irusamaya vilakkam
Sivagrayogi Saiva commentaries Guru Jnana-sambandha
Some Vaishnava works of Tirukkurugaip-perumal
Many Prabandhas Kaviraja panditar

1600 - 1700
Prayoga vivekam, Ilakkana vilakkam
Nighantus — Bharati dipam, Asiriya nighantu
Prabodha candrodayam
Puranams llke Tiru Arur, Puvanam, Sikalatti, Tiruccendur The first kirttanam
Numerous Saiva treatises
Vira Saivas — Sivaprakasa swami, Santalingar, Kumara devar, Cidambaraswami
Kumara gurupara, Padikkasu, Antakakkavi Viraraghava Many ballad poems.

	Many Saiva commentaries
	Swaminatha desikar — Ilakkanakkottu, poems
	Pillaipperumal Aiyangar
	Tamil navalar caritai Umaruppulavar
1700 - 1800	Tonnul Vilakkam, Catur aharadi, some nighantu works Beschi
	Kural venba poems — Vadamalai venba, Tirumalai venba, Tiruttondar venba etc
	Nallap-pillai — elaboration of Villi Bharatam
	Vadamalayappa pillayan — puranas
	Paranjoti munivar Adiyappa navalar Siva-rahasyam
	Sivajnanaswami, Kacciyappar and many others
	Many Saiva commentators
	Tayumanavar Abhirami antadi
	Tandavarayar — Kaivalya navanitam
	Basava purana
	Ramajaya tiruppuhal
	Miscellaneous Satakam poems
	Mukkudal pallu and other pallu poems, Nondi natakam and Kuravanji
	Eminent minor poets — Supradipa, Palapattadai Sokkanathap-pulavar, Tiri-kuta rajappa kavi-rayar
	Musical composers — Muttu Tandavai, Mari-muttap-pillai, Arunachala-kavi
	Ballad writing — Desingurajan kathai etc
1800 - 1900	Muthuvira-kavirayar — Muttuviriyam Tamil Kuvalayanandam
	Minakshisundaram pillai — old school purana poetry
	Arumukha navalar — birth of modern prose Pancatantiram, Vinodarasamanjari
	Ramalingaswami — Devotional poems and prose

Gopalakrishna bharati, Ananta bharati — musical pieces

Vedanayakam pillai — kirttanai, Nitinul and novel

Mambalakkavi, Sivakkolundu desikar, Dandapani swami — Puranams and minor poems

Nellayappa Kavirayar — Nellaip-puranam

Anthologies like Tanippadal tirattu etc

Innumerable minor poets like Annamalai reddiyar, Subbaraya swami and Alagiya Sokkanatha pillai, many musical composers

Krishna pillai — Christian books

Operas and dramas by many writers

Prose writers such as Viraswami Cettiyar, Toluvur Velayudha mudaliyar, Tandavaraya mudaliyar, Sabhapati navalar and scores of others

1900 - The era of Subrahmanya Bharati Only minor poets.

The era of scholarly edition of classics by Dr Swaminatha Aiyar

Writing proceeds on the following lines Adult reading books, autobiography, biography, children's literature, detective fiction, dictionary making, drama, essays, letters, linguistics, literary criticism, musical pieces, novel, poetry, research papers, scientific writing, short story, travelogue, and journalistic and political writing, translations from English and from the North Indian languages mostly of stories, novels and drama

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7. A History of Tamil Literature by M Varadarajan, Sahitya Akademi 1972 (Tamil)

III *Texts of the Books*

These have generally been indicated at the end of each section of this book

IV *Others*

1. *Peruntohai*, M Raghava Aiyangar, 1936
2. *Guru paramparai* six thousand, 1878,

INDEX

[*Names of books and poetic themes are given in italics*]

ERRATA

Page	*Line*	*Error*	*Correction*
41	27	compositions	compositions.[6]
67	4	langugage	language
80	28	chaptors	chapters
84	32	his the queen	his queen
102	1	is a	is an
107	26	extraovdinarily	extraordinarily
110	17	predominent	predominant
124	1	miles for	miles from
148	20	Tiruvoymoli	Tiruvaymoli
149	19	Tiruvallikkeni	Tirumayilai
	30	the	they
155	page heading	Saiva	Vaisnava
159	1	Vaishna	Vaisnava
	23	astakasra	astaksara
176	28	verses	lines
208	6-7	over 9000	6892
218	30	Vadkesari	Vadikesari
244	14		
248	9, 10, 13, 22, 32, 33	dhutu	dutu
249	6, 21		
281	25	20th	19th
292	26	is yet	are yet
304	3	advanccs	advances
311	31	any	any ado
332	2	peotry	poetry
342	15	Kalavlyal urai written down	Remove this line and place it as line 2 against the entry 900–1000.